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# MAMMON;

OR,

# THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

BY

MRS. GORE.

Glories, like glowworms, far away, shine bright;
But look'd-to near, have neither heat nor light.
WEBSTER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# MAMMON;

OR,

# THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

## CHAPTER I.

BE it not inferred from the churlishness ascribed by Blandhurst to Lynchcombe Hall, that Sir John Wraysbury was a niggard of his hospitalities. On the contrary, the new mansion was already as renowned for its pompous festivities, as became its gigantic proportions.—All the great people of the county had been successively entertained under its roof; and hecatombs were served upon a service of plate emblazoned in relief with the Wraysbury arms, choice specimens of which had made the

tour of Europe to delight the eyes of half its crowned heads ; and the Lynchcombe cellar of wines was supposed to excel that of Sardanapalus.

But after these periodical displays,—a not uncommon case, — the tureens and epergnes subsided into the plate closets, and the binns became hermetically sealed, for the better manufacture of cobwebs :—leaving father, daughter, and governess to so silent a system of daily meals, that the old family portraits might have figured at table without exhibiting greater taciturnity than the rest of the party. That celebrated picture, the foundation of Sir John Wraysbury's fortunes, to which, in gratitude, he had decreed the place of honour, in his banqueting-room of richly carved oak, seemed to look down with a smile of superiority on the ungenial formality of the circle.—If Echo was worshipped in silence, of old, by the disciples of Pythagoras, the descendants of Wraysbury the First were quite as deferential.

Among the few to whom the hospitalities of Lynchcombe were ever tendered in vain, and by whom at best they were reluctantly accepted, were the Farmers. But that Aunt Sophy considered it her duty to bring her two nieces occasionally together, never would they have crossed the threshold. Mr. Farmer, now ripening in years, and seeing only the clearer as he advanced towards the fountain-head of wisdom and light, regretted to perceive his predictions verified in the utter worldliness of his former pupil. So far from rising to the level of his fortunes, his faculties were becoming stifled in gold dust; till his noble-minded brother-in-law grew weary of his selfish parade and shabby mistrust. But the Farmers were afraid that if the little Constance they so dearly loved, were wholly withheld from her family, Sir John might some day or other take it into his head to claim her back from their hands.

Every spring, therefore, the dreariness of the young heiress's life was enlivened, for ten days

or a fortnight, by the company of that dear little sister, whose loss and absence had created such a void in her existence. For though Janetta never ventured to oppose any measure proposed or sanctioned by her father, the departure of Constance had grieved her all the more deeply that she had been forced to conceal her tears.

Miss Avesford, a born bankrupt in the affections, looked upon the relations of her pupils as a mere obstruction to the great business of youth—namely, the methodical acquirement of polite letters; and, like the spendthrift who defined trees as excrescences of the earth, created by nature for the defrayal of gentlemen's debts, regarded Aunt Sophy and her little protégée as excrescences created by nature for the purpose of alienating Miss Wraysbury's mind from her lessons. Having accidentally ascertained that Mrs. Farmer spoke no French and understood not a word of Italian or German, she felt indignant, indeed, that Sir John should waste a

fortnight of his daughter's precious time, in doing the honours of Lynchcombe to such an aunt.—Left in solitary possession of the school-room, to rehearse irregular verbs and correct an abridgment of the History of the Lower Empire for the use of schools, which she was endeavouring to render as dry as a lime-burner's wig, she grumbled sorely at the temporary enfranchisement of her victim.

But what moments of joy were those, for Janetta!—What a release!—What a comfort! —Aunt Sophy, the guardian angel of her childhood, whom she so well remembered, at Ramsgate, hanging over her feverish bed; when her father was absent, when her little brother lay dead and her mother dying.—She remembered, too, their summer pastimes at Denny Cross, when her newly-enriched parents were health-seeking in Germany. But the fondest remembrance of all was, that when her mother was taken from her, (and even now Netta could not recal the day without tears,) Mrs. Farmer led

her by the hand into the chamber of death, and having quietly removed the sheet from the sweet face of her they had lost, for her last, last kiss, they wept and prayed together.

So that Aunt Sophy was almost sacredly dear to her ; as dear as any thing *could* be, short of a mother ; and when she saw the affection existing between her and little Constance, so far from feeling jealous of either, she loved them both the better for the triple tie thus created.

Then it was so comfortable to be able to talk about Denny Cross, and inquire about grandpapa and Aunt Bessy. For her father, whom she seldom saw except in Miss Avesford's presence, always discouraged such inquiries ; and Netta, though too sensitive to express the surmise, had settled it with herself that it gave him pain to approach a subject, or a spot, so nearly connected with the memory of his departed wife.—His departed wife !—of whom he now thought as seldom as of the little Johnny lying in the Kentish churchyard, forgotten, un-

less a pretext was wanting to Sir John for his disregard of his sisters.

But even Mrs. Farmer was becoming less willing to answer the questions of Janetta concerning the dear old grandpapa by whom she used to be lifted on the back of the dun pony or introduced to the merry junketing of a harvest home.—Even Constance appeared estranged from the poor old man. For the venerable squire had, alas! outlived his faculties as well as his strength. Paralysis, accelerated by an unlucky accident, had long rendered him bedridden.

Janetta could now account for her father's refusal to allow her to accompany him to Harrals, at his last visit to the now nearly finished house, in order that she might enjoy, at least a day, at Denny Cross. He was right. The sight of the helpless old man would have been too painful. He was also right in forbidding her to continue her correspondence with him. But it would have saved her many anxious moments

had he explained the cause of his prohibition. She had feared that a total estrangement was springing up between the families.

"Poor girl—poor girl!" ejaculated Farmer, in answer to his wife's tearful statement of the want of confidence created between father and daughter by the systematic reserve of Sir John. "His heart has become callous by saturation in gold."

"Or perhaps he is beginning to entertain towards poor Netta the mean jealousy which kings and great people are said to entertain of their successors,"—added his wife.

"At all events," argued the kind-hearted old man, whose domestic affections, if they had blossomed late, had fructified kindly,—"at all events, do not render the girl over-conscious of her destitution, by letting her perceive our overfondness for our pet. No reason why, because we choose to make a spoiled child of Constance, we should make a malcontent of her sister."

Just then, however, it would have been dif-

ficult to overcloud Miss Wraysbury's sunny countenance. If Harry's holidays could but have been rendered simultaneous with the visit of the Farmers, her joy would have been too complete! —Not so, however, that of the veteran lawyer, whose vague notion of an Eton boy was that of an insane monkey escaped from its cage.

Janetta meanwhile had questions to propound to Aunt Sophy wholly unconnected with Denny Cross. Not missish questions. She had no curiosity to learn whether they were ever again to inhabit the house in Carlton Gardens. She had never troubled her head about coming out or being presented: not even after being nearly catechised to death on the subject by Mrs. Grandison and her daughters.—But she wanted to know what had become of certain aunts and cousins who haunted her memory, at times, like snatches of a half-forgotten tune. Surely she had been caressed and petted by an aunt Emma, and tormented by a cousin Edgar?—Surely Mrs. Farmer must recollect a noisy little girl in a pink sash, named

Theodosia, who had spent the day with them in Carlton Gardens?—

Then, there was a grave, silent boy,—his name, she thought, was Olave, whom her father had seemed to dislike, but who was certainly one of the family. In the old house at Harrals, she had heard her darling mother remonstrate with papa for taking no notice of his nephew. *How* was he his nephew, and *why* did he take no notice of him?—Was this sad-looking Olave still alive?—

"You have asked me more questions than I can answer, dearest Netta," replied her aunt, smiling at the affectionateness of nature that developed itself in spite of the refrigerating influence of her niece's education.—"Your father,' at the time of his marriage, had three sisters—"

"Yes, yes!—there was a third;—I felt sure there was a third!"—cried Miss Wraysbury, clapping her hands.—"I have so often thought about it,—so often wondered how it all used to

be. But papa so dislikes anything like idle questioning, that I never ventured to ask him.—Indeed, I could hardly have done so without alluding to former days and the name of poor, dear mamma," said she, in a more subdued voice.—"But I well remember, when I was a child in a black frock,—when we were all, even the servants, in mourning,—an aunt Clara.—Who was aunt Clara?—Was she married?"—

Mrs. Farmer was too discreet to answer "to her cost;"—but explained, in as few words as possible, that aunt Clara was the wife of a Mr. Wroughton,—for whom Sir John Wraysbury entertained no great partiality; that aunt Caroline, who had long been dead, had left a son called Olave Harpsden, who was destined for the church; and that aunt Emma and her husband, Mr. Molyneux, the parents of Edgar and Theodosia, resided chiefly in Italy.

This was as much as she could disclose without violating the rules laid down by Sir John in the education of his daughter. A hundred times

had he declared of old, in presence of his sister-in-law, that the breach between himself and his sisters was irreparable; and that never should his children live on terms of amity with their cousins. But she was not at that time prepared to find him so cruelly consistent. She was in hopes that time would have tamed down his resentments. As she glanced at the beautiful face of Janetta, animated by sensibility and intelligence, and then at the fair face of little Constance, who, though now nearly ten years old, was still fondled upon her knee, she could not help hoping that their mother's tender nature had descended to them, as well as her prepossessing smile. She trusted there was little of the unchristianised blood of the Woolstons in their humbler veins.

"I have news for you, my dear Mrs. Farmer," said Sir John, whose sudden entrance at that moment startled her from her reverie, and who was luckily too much absorbed in the intelligence he was about to communicate, to notice the

guilty blush with which his elder daughter greeted his arrival.

"Good, I hope?" she replied, endeavouring to rally her spirits.

"Good, in some points of view, though unfortunately prefaced by a death. To-day's Times, which I have left Farmer spelling over in the library, announces that Lord Dinton died suddenly, yesterday morning, while attending the Quarter Sessions."

"What a sad shock for his family!"

"At seventy-five?"

"At any age, the sudden death of a parent is awful. And the Molyneuxes are a very attached family. His daughters will be deeply affected."

"My precious brother-in-law, I suspect, will submit to his bereavement with much resignation,—unless his post-obits are heavier than we know of."

"Is that why you announced your news as good?"—

"Far from it. In Gerald or his affairs, I

retain not a particle of interest. But I was thinking that now would be the time for Wilchester (Lord Dinton we must learn to call him) to renew his suit to your sister,—if, indeed, he still entertains any intentions of the kind."

"He certainly does not;—for his suit needs no renewal.—It has never ceased," said Mrs. Farmer, a little disgusted.

"You don't mean that he ever actually proposed to Bessy Pennington!" exclaimed Sir John, with undisguised astonishment.

"Many years ago.—Long before the death of poor Maria."

"And she never confided it to me!"

"On second thoughts, I believe she was not aware of it; for even to myself, Bessy has never mentioned the subject.—It was Lord Wilchester himself who endeavoured to enlist the advocacy of my husband."

"How strange that he should never have spoken to *me*,—connected as I am with him by marriage!"

"That very circumstance may have created scruples.—It was scarcely likely you would promote a match so disadvantageous to the interests of your sister and nephew."

"It must, however, be pretty apparent to the Molyneux family, that all affection between Emma and myself was extinguished by her conduct to poor Maria and her babes; but pray tell me,—since you say that they came to an understanding some years ago,— what has prevented the marriage?—Wilchester was independent of his family."

"And had he not been so, they warmly approved his choice."

"Most extraordinary! — You don't really mean to say that Bessy refused him?"

"So he informed me. Had I heard it from my sister, I should have thought it necessary to keep her secret."

"She had some previous attachment then? —Perhaps, some previous engagement?"

"None whatever."

"Then why on earth, did not Farmer use his influence with her to promote the marriage?"

"My husband is of opinion that no person should ask, and no person give, advice on a point so entirely personal as matrimony."

"It is indeed a heavy responsibility," observed Sir John, recalling to mind how thoroughly Roger Farmer's own marriage had taken his friends by surprise.

"In Bessy's case, however," added Mrs. Farmer, "he could not have undertaken the suitor's cause, for he perfectly approved her conduct."

"Approved her refusing the hand of a peer—a wealthy peer—a man universally loved and respected?—Very unlike Farmer's usual good sense. In general, his views are more practical."

"He approved the conduct of Bessy, I was about to add, in acting up to the dictates of her conscience. She felt it her duty to devote herself to the declining years of my father. She

was his last, — his dearest, — his only.—And having once made up her mind to reject the most brilliant prospects for his sake, it would have been a capitulation of conscience had she been persuaded into an act that would probably have shortened the days of one to whom she was so nobly devoted."

"But why should it have shortened his days? Why could not Hugh take care of him?"

"My brother has his own avocations; and what son could replace female nursing and attendance, to one so helpless as my father?"

"But if Wilchester's heart were set upon the match, he would doubtless have spared no expense to have Mr. Pennington properly attended to."

Mrs. Farmer's cheeks flushed crimson.

"I thought you knew my poor father better. Did you ever find him accept obligations from a son-in-law? — When you proposed keeping a close carriage for him after his first paralytic attack——"

"Yes, yes! I remember,"—interrupted Sir John, who had felt deeply aggrieved, at the time, by the independent tone in which his somewhat patronising offer was declined by the Penningtons. "But this is a very different affair."

"*So* different, that Lord Wilchester would have given up a wing of his house at Havermead to the exclusive use of the invalid and his attendants, could Bessy have been induced to consent. But knowing my father's habits, she feared the change of residence would be irksome to him."

"What folly,—what infatuation,—what selfish disregard to the interests of her family!"

"She was aware that her family wanted nothing from Lord Wilchester," rejoined Mrs. Farmer, proudly. "Nor can I consider her conduct foolish, since the sacrifice has never caused her a moment's repentance."

Sir John Wraysbury checked a remark that was rising to his lips, not altogether complimentary to the understanding of poor Bessy.

"And do you really think," said he, after a short pause, "that Wilchester—that is, that Lord Dinton—might be induced to renew—"

But Mrs. Farmer would not hear him to an end. "He is still as deeply attached to my sister as a man can be," was her earnest reply. "They are not what is called engaged, because Bessy did not choose him to be hampered by ties which, living as he did in the world, and often apart from her for months together, might at times be a constraint."

"Romance!—Quixotism!"—

"Good sense and good feeling!" persisted Mrs. Farmer. "But though ignorant of my sister's present views and intentions, I confess I am of opinion that, all times and places having become alike to my poor old father, Bessy would be wrong to wait for his death to reward Lord Dinton's devotion. My father would not be conscious of his removal to the Castle; and she might become the happiest of wives, and perhaps

of mothers, without ceasing to be the best of daughters."

Sir John could scarcely listen to her with patience. *His* appreciation of the poor old squire, made after his usually monetary standard, stood at so low a figure, that the idea of *his* comfort or convenience being placed in the scale against that of the Right Honourable the Earl of Dinton, seemed preposterous. He had thought it absurd that Hugh Pennington, his brother-in-law, had chosen to wait for the old man's death before he took a wife and possession of the estate.—But the interpretation of the fifth commandment insisted on by Bessy and acquiesced in by the Farmers and the new Earl, was beyond his comprehension.

Catching a glimpse at that moment of Farmer, digesting his "Times" on the terrace facing the library window, he hurried off in search of him, hoping to extract from the husband some elucidation of the enigma propounded by the wife.

The door had scarcely closed upon him, and Mrs. Farmer still sat absorbed in the reflections to which his narrow-minded, or rather narrow-hearted philosophy gave rise, when she felt her hand, which rested on the shoulder of little Constance as she sat working on a low stool by her side, gently taken, and fondly pressed to the lips of her elder niece.—Unless she was much mistaken, a tear had fallen upon it before it was released.

"Netta!"—she exclaimed with surprise, remembering suddenly that on the entrance of Sir John, Miss Wraysbury had retreated into the embrasure of the Elisabethan window near which she was seated; and that, shaded by the heavy folds of the velvet curtain, she must have been an auditress of their explanations.

"Forgive me!" whispered the young girl, endeavouring to overcome her emotion.

"Forgive you for what, my dear child?—For having accidentally learned what I have no objection that you should know?"—

"No, no;—for having troubled you with so many idle questions about my father's family, when there was so much in your own to excite my interest and respect.—Dear aunt, all this is so new to me!—Till now, I never dreamed that, in a quiet destiny like aunt Bessy's, there could be scope for so much heroism,—so much greatness of mind:—*real* greatness!"—added Janetta, drawing a chair close to Mrs. Farmer's, and again taking her hand.

"You have been hitherto too young, Janetta, to be talked to about such things."

"Why too young?—For how many years past has my memory been loaded, in lessons, with historical examples of fortitude,—magnanimity,—disinterestedness,—resignation,—every high-sounding virtue.—Yet I have been allowed to consider this dear self-denying aunt of mine as a mere inoffensive woman,—a neglected old maid,—to my recollections of whom, it rather annoyed papa to see me cling with affection.—I ought to have been taught to regard her with

veneration!" added Janetta, with enthusiasm. And from her seeming remorse, Mrs. Farmer readily inferred that Sir John Wraysbury of Lynchcombe, had endeavoured to extinguish all reminiscence of the Denny Cross, which to John Woolston of Maple Hill, had been so often a city of refuge.

It was something that neither the mercenary father nor the eclectic governess had been able to crush down in the heart of her niece the generous impulses of nature; and at that moment Netta appeared as dear to her as when, in infancy, she had so often hung over her cot, to soothe her to sleep, or await her early waking.

"But tell me about this Lord Wilchester—this Lord Dinton,"—resumed Miss Wraysbury, when many a loving kiss had been imprinted on her fair young forehead.—"Is he, except for his constancy, worthy of aunt Bessy?"

"That depends on your notion of desert. He is neither young nor handsome, Netta;—

qualities essential to a young lady's hero of romance."

"But I am not yet what is called a young lady. The only heroes I am acquainted with, are either accoutred in chain-mail, or wear ruffs and peaked beards."

"Then I must admit that there is little of the Bayard, or the Sir Philip Sidney, in Lord Dinton.—But he is a man of the highest qualities; a man who has spent his life in doing kindly actions, and, without placing himself prominently before the world, promoting the good of the many and the happiness of those nearest to him."

"Well, *that*, I call a hero!"—rejoined Netta, eagerly.—"And how fortunate, that a man so excellent should have found out, in her quiet obscurity, a person so nobly assorted to him as my aunt!"

Miss Avesford, had she been present, would perhaps have suggested something about "elective affinities." Mrs. Farmer, alluding proba-

bly to her own singularly happy marriage, merely said that the goodness of God often placed most unexpectedly in each other's way, the persons of all others best suited to promote each other's happiness.

"Do you think so?—Do you *really* think so?" inquired Netta, with kindling interest. —"It would make me very happy to believe it.—The time is coming,—(I am seventeen, you know, aunt Sophy, next week,—and what happy birth-days you and dear mamma used to prepare for me when I was a little, little child;—and what would I give to have one of those birthdays again)"—

"Seventeen!—*Already!*"—interrupted Mrs. Farmer with a sigh.

"And I must some day,—at no distant time perhaps,—mix in the world, and love, and marry, like other people. Now the persons with whom papa likes chiefly to associate, are just such as would never 'promote *my* happiness;' and I sometimes fear that if some favourite friend of his

wanted me for a wife, my own inclinations would be very little consulted—*I* should not be allowed to say 'no,' like aunt Bessy."

Mrs. Farmer patted kindly the head now almost nestling on her shoulder.

"Your alarms, my dear child, are a little premature," said she. "In the first place, papa appears to have very few favourite friends; nor are these times when reluctant damsels are forced into compulsory marriages.—Next year, Netta, you will probably accompany him to town. He tells me he is re-furnishing the house in Carlton Gardens."

"The last place I could wish to live in," exclaimed Netta, the smiles called forth by the kindness of aunt Sophia vanishing at once. "I have never been there since my darling mother's death."

"Yet if he wishes it, Netta, you must obey. To sacrifice your own wishes at the call of duty, is one of those traits of the heroism of private life, of which you spoke just now with such enthusiasm."

"I shall at least see more of you and Constance than by remaining at Lynchcombe," replied Janetta,—endeavouring to reconcile herself to the idea of a fine house and gay season in town.

"We shall meet often, I trust," said Mrs. Farmer; while the industrious little girl by her side, threw down her work to rejoice with her sister at so pleasant a prospect. "But I doubt, darling, whether your father will wish you to be *too* much in our society. He will probably have higher ambitions."

She checked herself; remembering how anxiously Sir John had forewarned her against prematurely apprising his daughter that she was the first heiress in the kingdom.

"But what has ambition to do with family affection?" exclaimed Janetta, warmly.—"Are you not my own dear aunt?"

"So is my sister Bessy.—Yet Sir John has, for some years past, forbidden your visits to Denny Cross."

"Only because they would have interrupted my education."

Mrs. Farmer smiled.

"Sir John is likely to come into parliament," added she, desirous to distract her niece's attention.—"He has been solicited to stand for Northamptonshire; and now his building is over, both here and at Harrals, his time is his own, and he will probably make it over to the country. This will necessitate his frequent residence in town."

"And at Harrals, too," added Miss Wraysbury, cheerfully,—for the idea of Northamptonshire connected itself with Denny Cross, and seemed to *dis*-connect them with the county into which she felt that they had simply purchased their way.

"It has always been anticipated," added Mrs. Farmer, "that when the death of the old Earl placed Lord Wilchester in the Upper House, your father would succeed him in the representation of the county."

"God grant that he may prove worthy of his predecessor!"—said Janetta, fervently.

And with more earnestness than conviction, did Mrs. Farmer echo the prayer.

## CHAPTER II.

Poor old Denny Cross!—If human beings of a certain age exhibit little improvement in aspect as they advance in years, houses and household goods, when unrenovated, are not less apt to degenerate.—If somewhat worn during the courtship of John Woolston, the lapse of more than a score of years, during which not a guinea had been unnecessarily laid out on the beautification of the place, left it miserably shabby.

The young squire, if such a word were still applicable to a man so bald and steady as Hugh

Pennington, though forced by his father's imbecile condition to take upon himself the administration of the family affairs, was so nobly frugal in his expenditure, (in order that the utmost economy might set aside some provision for his two younger brothers, who were struggling for a competence in that anomalous quarter of the world which in some future century will enrich or extinguish the mother country,) that the parlour carpet was threadbare, and the ungravelled garden-walks were all but converted into meadow-land.

Yet such was the happy influence of Bessy's cheerful countenance and soothing voice, that the devoted man who quitted gilded cornices and three-piled velvet to seek her in that dreary abode, had never so much as noticed its discomfort.— There, he was always sure to find her,— always occupied, but never busy; overjoyed by his arrival, yet betraying her happiness only by heightened colour, or the inner brightening of the eye:—ever ready to

listen when he wanted to talk,—or to talk, if he seemed disposed to listen.

For though Miss Pennington had arrived at the critical age of thirty and a year or two, she retained the bloom of early girlhood. As amid the tranquil plains of the Low Countries, the monuments of the middle ages retain an almost miraculous freshness, while their mediæval contemporaries of less torpid lands are shaken into ruins, the gentle anchorette of Denny Cross was perhaps indebted to its untroubled atmosphere for a more than allotted prolongation of youth.—On the very day that Lord Dinton, as soon as was respectful to the memory of his father after consigning him to the tomb, made his appearance in his old haunts, to urge more earnestly than ever her acceptance of his hand, one of the girlish but London-worn Miss Grandisons might have been jealous of her smoothness of brow and purity of complexion.

The new Earl came armed with many fresh

arguments in his own favour. He had ascertained that the removal of Bessy and her father from Denny Cross would facilitate a marriage likely to insure the happiness of the son who was at present scarcely master of the house; and on the other hand, he brought with him letters from his mother and sisters, assuring her that nothing would so much endear the asylum offered to them by Dinton at the Castle for the remainder of their days, as to find the family circle completed by her presence.

But there was no need for him to accost her with these persuasives. On seeing him in such deep mourning, and so much disheartened and fagged by the dispiriting scenes through which he had been lately passing, Bessy was more touched by his hollow eyes than by the best eloquence he could have exercised. As she gazed upon him, her own were filled with tears.

When he became sufficiently himself to argue that their immediate union would be the

means of securing not only their own happiness, but that of four persons so dear to them, she was prepared to listen; and by the time the new Earl remounted his horse, after luncheon, to ride back to the Castle, he had obtained a letter in answer to that of his mother, promising her a third daughter to be the comfort of her declining years.

They were to be married,—even that question was all but settled,—when the close of his six months' mourning enabled the Earl to appear at the altar in a suit suitable a bridegroom.—Even *he* pressed for no more; aware that the dowager Countess would be distressed by the slightest infringment of those laws of propriety on which she delighted to "show an example to the county."

In the interim, he was to be as much the happiest of men as comported with his black gloves and the crape round his hat; and above all, with having to ride or drive three or four times a week over a hard and hilly road for a

glimpse of his ladye-love ;—a performance far more trying than Romeo's, when he over-topped the orchard walls of that prosy gentleman, Old Capulet.

When it transpired in the neighbourhood, as such secrets though sealed under the patent locks of Chubb are sure to transpire, that the alliance was settled, the lukewarm young gentlemen of the day, whom nothing short of a fox has power to stir to exertion, shrugged their shoulders at the idea of taking so much trouble for a woman " hundreds of years' old ;"—while such of the young ladies, from the daughters of Groby Abbey downwards, as had entertained abortive designs on the middle-aged Romeo, expressed sincere pity for the future Countess. Not one among them would have heard of such a thing as residing under the same roof with the dowager and her two elderly daughters. What a circle of coddles !—What a jumble of rights and titles !—

Yet it was to that very home-circle the kindly

Bessy was looking forward as to one of the most attractive features of her married life. Since the departure of her sisters from Denny Cross, she had been prevented by her father's claims upon her time, from cultivating much intimacy with those of her own sex. And now that Mr. Pennington's state precluded all enjoyment of domestic intercourse,—now that her brother's thoughts were engrossed elsewhere by his attachment and its projects, — now that Netta was no longer permitted to visit or correspond with Denny Cross,—she often sighed after female companionship. Her perspective of the fireside at the Castle was bright with pleasant hopes.

It was a comfort to know that the Gerald Molyneuxes had established themselves permanently in Italy. From all she had formerly heard from poor Maria of her gay sister-in-law, Bessy Pennington felt that she should have scarcely found courage to confront the indignation of the worldly Emma, to whose pride the

marriage of her old bachelor brother-in-law would be indeed a blow.

She would have hardened her heart, however, could she have heard the unwomanly savageness with which Mrs. Molyneux, whose nature, never very tender, had hardened by continually struggling against the rough handling of the world, allowed herself to comment on the tardy union of the superannuated Pyramus and Thisbe.—It would have been difficult to combine greater injustice with bitterer spite than was exhibited on occasion of the marriage, both by Gerald and his wife.

For the conduct of Lord Dinton had been more than generous. Not only had he doubled the addition which his father's death made to their bespoken income; but in stating his desire that Edgar, now at Oxford, should complete his education on the same liberal scale on which, as heir-apparent to the family honours, it had commenced, had settled twenty thousand pounds upon his nephew, lest the change in his pros-

pects should prove a drawback to his entrance into life.

"We are all much attached to him," wrote he to his brother. "A finer young fellow never lived. And I trust that, a year or two hence, when the tour of Europe (which you think so indispensable,) is complete, you will allow him to consider Molyneux Castle his permanent home."

"A pretty home, poor boy; mewed up with those four old maids, and the dowager!" exclaimed Mrs. Molyneux, when these kind proposals were recited to her by her husband. "But there is one comfort. Such an establishment can never hold together. The arrangement will not last a year. As our wise Queen Elisabeth observed, 'the sky cannot bear two suns;' and your mother would as little like to subside into a satellite, as a Miss Pennington to put up with being less than paramount in her own house."

"The system works well enough here, and

still better in France," retorted her husband, whose feelings were in some degree softened towards the intended bride and bridegroom by the provision secured to his son.—"Look at the San Sevorinis, — look at the Guidaldis. Above all, look at the Biron-Argenteaus. Three dowagers under one roof,—as happy as weasels in a meal-tub."—

"Foreigners are better-humoured than English people," said Mrs. Molyneux, peevishly; "and are taught from the cradle the virtue of mutual aid and mutual toleration. Whereas *we* are allowed to make such pets of all our little selfishnesses, that close contact makes us unbearable to each other. — Depend upon it there will soon be fighting and scratching at the Castle; and I shall write and advise Edgar to keep out of the way of their squabbles."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind," said Gerald, in a tone which even his habitually listless air did not prevent from being peremptory.—"How is your son ever to make

acquaintance with his cousin, except through the medium of my brother and his intended?"

"*What* cousin?" inquired Mrs. Molyneux, with real or affected surprise.

"His cousin at Harrals."

"The boy is still at Eton; and seven years younger than Edgar.—Perhaps you mean Olave Harpsden, who is about his own age?"—

"You know perfectly well whom I mean.—There is but one member of your family with whom it could be of the slightest advantage to him to associate.—Of mine, not one."—

"Why not explain yourself more clearly? Had you said 'the *heiress*,' I should have understood you *à demi mot*."

"But had I said the heiress, and had you written of her by that name to Edgar, the quills of his magnanimity would have been on end, and there would have been an end of my project. Be cautious, therefore."

"Not with *him*. I am ready to exercise my utmost tact with all the rest of the world. But

to my darling Edgar, I write as my heart dictates. I would not manœuvre with Edgar, to make a prince of him."

"But I suppose you would do something to prevent his becoming a beggar?—which, if Providence should crown this slow match of my brother's with a large family, is likely enough to become his case."

"Lord Dinton has provided against *that*."

"As if twenty thousand pounds were not beggary to a young fellow brought up like Edgar!"

"At all events, he is certain of an introduction to my niece, without assistance from the future Lady Dinton."

"I doubt it.—Wraysbury has always detested us. People generally hate their poor relations. Do you remember how you abominated his wife, when they were living on three farthings a year, somewhere near Hampstead or Highgate?"

"Abominated, no!—You might as well talk of stabbing a cobweb.—There was not sub-

stance in poor Maria to excite so strong a feeling."

"Neglected, then.—Why cavil about such paltry distinctions?—But setting aside the especial dislike with which we are honoured by Wraysbury, I understand he is bringing up his daughter under the receiver of an air-pump."

"What can you possibly mean?"

"Inquire of Berty Grandison what *he* means. Berty is my informant. Berty's father has a place in Dorsetshire—*has* had since the Conquest,—a few miles from the quarry-above-ground which Sir John has judiciously placed at the edge of a cliff as high as Shakspeare's."

"I was not aware that old Grandison resided near my brother. That accounts for Albert's assiduities in this house."

"I flatter myself, the best dinner and best whist-table in Rome require no such endorsement. But ask him by-and-by, and he will tell you that Miss Wraysbury is educated as if in-

tended for a Sister of Mercy. No one is allowed to see her, and she is allowed to see no one.—The man in the iron mask was not more scrupulously guarded than Janetta by that patent governess whom you introduced into the family a dozen years ago."

"Poor child! Has she been undergoing high-pressure cultivation all this time under the drill system?—What a little dunce she must have grown up!"

"You and your brother differ as widely in your theories of education, as in most other respects.—Miss Wraybury has been reared in the dark, to teach her to see: and Theo. in the blaze of day, in hopes to render her blind."

"Say rather to accustom her to sights which are apt to startle a novice, and render her first step in life a stumble.—Janetta will have every thing to learn, at the time she should be enjoying and adorning society."

"I suppose you know best. *I* have never interfered in Theo's education,—admitting it to

be your department as much as that of the boy is mine.—Theo. is a tolerably good girl, I believe; and a very pretty one, as you, and Fred Hill, and Saint Marcel, and Berty Grandison, have been telling her twenty times a day, ever since she was out of a pinafore.—Still, I can't fancy that she would be the less attractive for being a little less *désabusé du monde*. To be occasionally startled and shy, would do her no harm, —Babies in long-clothes cannot be taught to walk alone.'—

For the credit of human nature, be it recorded that the nephew, of whose possible fate Lord Dinton was so considerate, evinced a little more gratitude than his heartless parents.—Perhaps, because his disappointment was less.—His school and college vacations, spent at the Castle, had not only attached him to its inmates, but rendered him fully aware of Lord Wilchester's attachment; and though the old servants and tenants persisted in regarding him as the heir of Dinton, *he* had never been deceived. Often had

he accompanied his uncle in his courtship expeditions to the old parlour, and was a favourite alike with Roger Farmer and the less unsophisticated family of the old squire; and so warmly did he share the partiality of Lady Mary and Lady Jemima for the gentle recluse, whom he persisted in calling "*la belle au bois dormant*," that, when informed that though the funeral baked meats of the late Earl were not to furnish forth the marriage-table of his successor, the bombazine of the two noble spinsters was, in a decent time, to give place to bridesmaiden white, he was unable to resist a mild "hurrah!"

"I knew it would be so," said Lady Jemima to her sister, when they subsequently discussed the conduct of their nephew. "Edgar is as noble-hearted a being as ever breathed. Not a particle of Woolston in his composition. I was certain Edgar would be overjoyed at an event that promised happiness to his uncle."

"May your words prove true!" rejoined Lady Mary. "The change in Edgar's prospects was

the only drawback to my delight in this marriage; just as my dislike to any further connection with Sir John Wraysbury, was my only objection to dear Bessy."

Aware that her sister's antipathy to Sir John Wraysbury arose from the belief once prevalent in the neighbourhood, that a marriage between John Woolston and either of the sisters had been vainly proposed to him by the late Sir Harry, and would have been highly acceptable to the late Lord Dinton, (his own strong opposition to the match having become equally public,) Lady Jemima contented herself with replying, that Sir John Wraysbury, having established himself at Lynchcombe, would probably be a rare guest at Molyneux Castle.

"But if he succeeds to my brother, as every body seems to predict, as representative of the county?"—

"True;—I had not thought of him in that capacity. But is it certain that he will be returned?"

"Dinton has no doubt of it. He has been solicited to stand; and the representation of his own county is too great an honour to be declined. Purse-proud as he is, he can scarcely feel superior to such a distinction."—

"Does my brother mean to support him?"—

"Why not?—Their politics are the same. They were intimate at college, and are nearly connected by marriage. There is every reason why Dinton should uphold Sir John Wraysbury. —In fact, my brother's name is at the head of the deputation."

"Then of course we shall have him settling at Harrals!"

"A neighbour the more. And it would be such a delight to Bessy to have her little niece within reach."

"To Molyneux Castle, I dare say Sir John will find the road from Harrals as short as Gerald used to find it from the Castle to Harrals, when he was in love with Emma Woolston. But if Bessy had been fated to live and die Miss

Pennington, I suspect that Denny Cross would have proved immeasurably too far for frequent visiting."

"I am afraid," said Lady Mary, "that his nature is sadly deteriorated since the days when my brother upheld him as so well-principled and so wise. Without going into Emma's grievances against her brother, he seems to have behaved in a cold-blooded manner towards his family. But admit that poor Lady Wraysbury was one of the sweetest creatures in the world? And in her daughter I feel sincerely interested."

"She has a great part to play in life," replied Lady Jemima. "She is to inherit that enormous Wraysbury property: whereas the boy, at the death of his father, will become only Woolston of Harrals;—a country baronet, with less than ten thousand a year."

"And a very good thing too," retorted her sister, with a reprehensive shake of the head. "In his place, I should prefer it to the mass of Liverpool money, scraped together, it is said, by

slave-trade speculations. But here comes Dinton, and nothing does he more dislike than the discussion of people's means and connections, which he calls gossip and water—the meanest form of a bad thing. What has he in his hand?—Aha!—Sir John Wraysbury's Address to the County."

## CHAPTER III.

Few things produce a more complete revolution in the best-regulated family, than an Election.—Next to a fire, nothing so imperceptibly gains ground, or so irresistibly carries all before it.

Sir John Wraysbury soon found himself enveloped in the flames of a blazing committee. For an opposition had suddenly started up. The Liberals of the county, who had hitherto reckoned him among their party, had, after perusing his Address, started a Free Trader; and the Landed Gentry were in an uproar. Now, as an

Election Committee is intitled, like the second in a duel, to take the conscience of the parliamentary aspirant out of his own hands, just as the second holds in his keeping the honour of his principal, the arbitrary baronet, so fond of the exercise of his authority, found himself most unpleasantly reduced to a cypher.—Enamoured as he was of his own consequence, both moral and personal, he found that on the present occasion he was only allowed to enunciate the speeches prepared for him, and give a blank cheque to his attorneys.—Though aware that the contest, thanks to the contumacy of Groby Abbey in supporting Mr. Aberdon Malins, who had undertaken to restore Catholic Disabilities and treble the duty on corn, would cost him an amount of thousands which, in his Maple Hill days, would have passed for a fabulous sum, he was not allowed to exercise his own understanding in so much as the choice of colour for his cockades!

That he must establish himself for a time at

Harrals he at once perceived. He at first intended, indeed, to leave his daughter and establishment at Lynchcombe. But this he found would be a grave offence to the county, which was about to invest its rights in his person. Miss Wraysbury belonged to it. The great heiress of the day was the property of the shire, both by her father's and mother's side. And as it appeared by the baronetage that the young lady was in her eighteenth year, it was instantly decided that she must form one of the "unprecedented attractions" of the Blue party.—Lady Clementina Aberdon Malin paraded three daughters and a daughter-in-law in the family barouche. It would not do for Sir John Wraysbury to surround himself exclusively with broadcloth.—The deep mourning of the Molyneux family precluded their participation in the tumults of the hustings. Lord Algernon Rawdon, the second name on the committee, was as guiltless as a trappist of female alliance. Miss

Wraysbury must compensate for all. Yes, the heiress of Lynchcombe must be forthcoming.

Vainly did Sir John represent that his daughter had never appeared in society:—that she had not even been presented. The committee decided that the rank in life of Woolston of Harrals, did not render such a ceremonial indispensable; and Sir John was privately admonished not to let any allusion to courts or the courtly just then escape his lips. The farmers might hear him, and the effect be injurious.

A summons to Miss Avesford and Netta was in the end hastily despatched; and though the candidate for parliamentary honours sorely longed to adjoin to the missive (like Athelwold the Thane, in writing to his fair Elfrida,) a private prohibition, he was forced to order apartments prepared for her at Harrals Hall.

Unspeakable was the joy of Janetta!—Not because unexpectedly emancipated from the school-room two months earlier than the ap-

pointed time; but because Harrals had been the dream of her fancy for years immemorial, and though the house had long been completed, Sir John Wraysbury evinced no intention of removing his family to the spot. Since her mother's death, Janetta had not visited Northamptonshire; and though the new mansion had no especial claim to her interest, how fondly did she long to visit the old church with its family monuments,—the old church where her dear mother was lying!—That much, however short her stay, she might certainly accomplish.—Of Denny Cross, she felt less sure. Still, it would go hard if she did not manage to obtain a glimpse of aunt Bessy's loving face, and pay her duty to "poor grandpapa."

All this she revolved and revolved as they traversed the dreary Hampshire Heaths, in order to attain the Midland railway; and while settling how it was to be managed without provoking the opposition of Sir John, Miss Avesford's rational prose fell unnoticed upon her ear

as the ticking of a clock.—The purport and forms of an election,—the nature of the Great British constitution,—the rights of the Crown, —the state of parties, past, present, and future, —were judiciously explained by the patent governess. And as her instructions took the shape of a remarkably dull lecture which required no reply,—not even so much as notes of admiration to her notes of historical fact,— Janetta was delighted with her journey.

How she longed for the sight of the new old house.—She knew it only by the design originally furnished to Sir John by his architect; and her eye being less familiar than the almshouses erected within the last ten years have rendered us with the type of scarlet brick and fantastic copings, such as James I. is supposed to have brought from Scotland, and which Scotland borrowed from Flanders, and Flanders it is thought from Spain, she was all eagerness to look upon a façade so quaintly dissimilar from the cold white dignity of Lynchcombe.

In the hurry of his numberless engagements and appointments, Sir John had forgotten to send a carriage to the station for her, according to his promise; and it was in a very shabby fly, smelling as powerfully of musty hay as if *she* also had an unpayable coal-bill, that the heiress approached the ancient territory of her race.—On entering the park, her attention became so much absorbed by the majestic oaks and elms so much wanting to her sea-bound southern palace, that Miss Avesford instantly perceived that her prose would be thrown away. And lo! the word-mill ceased to clatter.

The style of architecture selected by Sir John was admirably in accordance with the extensive table-land that afforded a site to both the former mansion and the present, as well as with the rigid foliage of the pine grove, which, from some latent yearning after the days of his youth, he had been unwilling to consign to the axe. Nay, even with "the mournful family of yews," somewhat lavishly scattered about; which, from

their marvellous growth and beauty, it would have been a crime to sacrifice.

During the ascendancy of Emma and her sisters at Harrals, the old-fashioned gardens, with their wide, straight gravel-walks, their terraces and stone vases, their walls of hornbeam and holly hedges cut into parapets, (co-eval with the battle of the Boyne,) had been an object of perpetual derision to the junior branches of the house of Woolston.—But the utmost scoffing of the young ladies had not induced Sir Harry to sanction their demolition; not because the sentiment of early association pleaded in their favour; but because to root up the old yews, and extirpate the old hornbeam, would have been a source of some expense.—He set his face resolutely, therefore, against French parterres, which he called the puffs and tartlets of a garden; and the utmost horticultural improvement attempted at Harrals in his time, was the planting of the shrubbery leading to the Londonward Lodge, under the shade of whose gloomy Portugal laurels

his son and heir had come to that luckless fit of obstinacy so often repented.

The result was, that the "improvers" employed by the millionary baronet, had found it no less feasible than fashionable to surround the antiquated manor-house with an appropriate pleasaunce; and the edges were re-clipped, and the old yews came out strong in the formal alleys.—In the fore-court, had been judiciously preserved four splendid cedar-trees, such as the shades of Jussieu or Tournefort might have haunted; standing grim and dignified at the angles of the richly carved balustrades, like four familiars of the Inquisition.

Janetta was enchanted.—It was her first acquaintance with an old chateau revivified by a *fontaine de jouvence*,— for such surely was the noble fountain of white marble, "shaking its loosening silver in the sun," in the centre of the court.

But who might be the pilgrim standing under the lofty portal?—A tall rusty-coated

young man, who looked more like a tradesman waiting for orders, than a visitor to the house; though the manner in which he was addressed by the footman, who stood at the open door (glancing with an air of contempt towards the entering fly with luggage, which he concluded to contain some of the understrappers of his new fellow-servants from the county of Dorset, and which he was consequently about to order round to the back entrance,) betokened that he belonged to a higher class than was denoted by the quality of his cloth.

As the jingling fly drew up before the portal, the stranger, turning between the enscrolled balustrade that bordered the hall-steps, confronted, face to face, the new-comers; when something in the expression of his own, arrested Miss Wraysbury's attention. It was a grave, earnest look, singularly at variance with the scared and foolish face of the servant; who became ten times more bewildered, on discovering, from the indignant inquiries of the

governess concerning the missing carriage, that it was his master's daughter he had been about to dismiss from his gates.

The stranger, having slightly touched his hat to the ladies with whom he was thus clòsely brought into collision, had already quitted the spot. But while the servant who, by the absence of his superior in attendance on Sir John, was left to a charge above his capacity, was deliberating whether it was his business to settle with the flyman, order him round to the offices for the discharge of the baggage, or usher his young lady into the house,—he returned, and followed Janetta and her duenna into the hall.

In advancing to accost her, the removal of his hat proved highly beneficial to his shabby appearance; for it gave to view a well-turned head, richly covered with wavy chestnut hair; a fine forehead, and a pair of large and expressive dark grey eyes: the very man,—unless, it should prove to be a parish clerk, or bookseller's bagman,—for a hero of romance!

The footman, restored in some measure to his senses, thought it necessary to place Miss Wraysbury's mind at ease respecting the intruder, by stammeringly announcing "Young Mr. Harpsden."

Before Janetta could so much as start or blush, in token of surprise, her cousin followed up the announcement by apologies uttered in so subdued and constrained a tone, that it was clear he felt ashamed either of his coat or his cousinship.

But the few words that followed, rendered Miss Wraysbury far more agitated than himself.

"I came here by my father's desire," said he, "to inquire whether Sir John is really as much injured as report has stated. I am unable to procure from your servant the desired information.—But your presence here is sufficient attestation that rumour has exaggerated the evil."

"What evil?—I do not understand you,"

faltered Janetta, with shortened breath. "Pray explain yourself.—You are, I conclude, my cousin Olave.—What is supposed to have occurred to my father?"

"If you have heard nothing, we must of course have been misinformed," replied Olave Harpsden, colouring deeply, and feeling himself much in the wrong.

"Pardon me. We left Dorsetshire at six this morning. Yesterday's letters have not yet reached us."

"If you have anything, sir, to confide to my pupil relative to Sir John Wraysbury, or the progress of his election," interposed Miss Avesford, stiffly, "let me request that you will make me the medium of your communications."

"Pray, pray speak!" cried Janetta, becoming seriously alarmed; "what has happened?—Where,—how is my father?"—

"I still trust that the report may be premature," replied Olave Harpsden, eager to appease

her fears. "But a messenger from Northampton passed through the village, an hour ago, bearing a letter from Lord Dinton to Denny Cross; who stated that an election riot had taken place,—that the military were called out,—and that Sir John Wraysbury had received a wound, (a slight one doubtless,) from some missile. It was to prevent any misconception, of persons,—to set the mind of Miss Pennington, in short, at rest,—that Lord Dinton judged it necessary to dispatch authentic intelligence."

Carefully as Mr. Harpsden disguised the facts of the case,—that Sir John was seriously injured,—the mere hint sufficed to drive every vestige of colour from Janetta's cheek. Unaccustomed to shocks of feeling, she looked imploringly towards Miss Avesford, to suggest such further questioning as she was unable to articulate.

"It is highly desirable, sir," said the preceptress, drawing up to backboard pitch, "that, having alarmed Miss Wraysbury so cruelly by a preci-

pitate revelation of tidings of apparently very doubtful authenticity, you should be a little more circumstantial in your explanations. On what day, and at what hour, did this disastrous disturbance occur?—And at the instigation of what party, pray, was the aid of the soldiery demanded?"

"I am sorry, madam, to be unable to satisfy you," was young Harpsden's moderate reply. "It was the hope of putting an end to my uncertainties that brought me hither. But surely if the facts were as strong as represented, information would have already reached the establishment here?"

"Sir John Wraysbury's house-steward, butler, valet, and head footman are with him, I find, at Northampton," observed Miss Avesford, as haughtily as if semi-proprietress of the domestics so pompously enumerated. "I will ring and make inquiries of the housekeeper."

But the housekeeper, to whom a sudden influx of company had already flustered, so far

from being able to afford information, could only add to their distresses a flood of tears.

"If you thought fit," said young Harpsden, suddenly addressing his cousin, "I would ride over immediately to Denny Cross, and ascertain the exact truth. I could be there and back in an hour and a half,—that is,"—he continued, with the frankness of a person unaccustomed to regard poverty as a crime,—"if you can afford me the means. My father has neither stud nor stable; and I should lose more time than you could bear to wait, in seeking for a horse in the village."

Miss Wraysbury gave the necessary orders to the housekeeper, who still lingered, sobbing, near the door. Singular enough, that the first act of authority exercised by Janetta under her father's roof, should be in favour of a cousin whose very existence was scarcely recognised by Sir John.

"I will wait upon you again, as promptly as possible, with whatever information I can gather," said Harpsden, judiciously hastening his

departure, that the anxious daughter might be left to the indulgence of emotions on which the presence of a stranger imposed restraint. And no sooner was he gone, than she experienced, though not quite so hysterically as the fat housekeeper, the solace of tears.

So far from even glancing at the walls of that new home, so often thought and dreamed of, her face was buried in a sofa cushion, and a thousand indistinct terrors perplexed her mind. Her father was wounded,—perhaps in danger,—perhaps (oh, Heaven avert it!) already dead. How did she accuse herself of recent remissness in her filial duties!—No, she had not loved him as she ought. She, the niece of the exemplary Bessy, that tenderest of daughters, had allowed her affections to be chilled by the distance he chose to place between them. That estrangement she ought to have superseded by warmer devotion. She had done nothing to improve his love. She had made no effort to obtain his confidence.

And if this rumour should be true? If this

wound should prove fatal?—If she should be already an orphan?—A terrible gulf seemed to be opening at her feet!—Her brother was a mere child,—her sister, the adopted of another household. But for her father, however cool,—however distant,—she was alone in the world!

Every minute she was now living seemed an hour, so pregnant was it with thronging thoughts and throbbing emotions.

Even Miss Avesford was forced to respect her grief; and leaving her to its indulgence, proceeded to make the tour of the house, scrutinizing every article of furniture or *virtù* with, as brokerish an eye as that of Mary of Orange, when examining the mattrasses and blankets of her miserable parents' abandoned palace at Whitehall.

Once, during Mr. Harpden's absence, which her impatience led her to fancy unreasonably prolonged, she started up, and insisted on proceeding to Northampton.—But trifling obstacles are often insuperable. No post-horses were

kept in the village; and Sir John's equipages were all engaged in his election business, the cause of her disappointment at the railway station.—And when the experience of seventeen saw no objection to the only means of conveyance within reach, namely, the taxed cart belonging to the stables, Miss Avesford was forced to remind her, that even had chariots and horses been at her disposal, Sir John's instructions, forwarded to them at Lynchcombe, had strictly interdicted their joining him at Northampton.

While the glass of water was still at her lips, which proved the only refreshment she was capable of swallowing, her cousin Olave quietly re-entered the room; quietly, as regarded deportment,—perhaps that he might not incur another rebuke from the preceptress. But his cheek was flushed, and his eye anxious. He had evidently heard worse news than he chose to communicate.

"The injury sustained by Sir John was inconsiderable," he said;—"a blow on the temple

from a stone. But, as Lord Dinton stated in his note, at election times, such incidents are made the most of by both parties:—on one side, to excite sympathy with the victim,—on the other, to avouch unpopularity."

"Lord Dinton, then, considered my father in no sort of danger?" exelaimed Janetta.

"None whatever.—But the convictions of a friend are less to be trusted than those of a professional man."

"You have, perhaps, obtained further and less satisfactory intelligence?"

"Not on which dependence can be placed. But I agree with Miss Pennington, that it would be better if you proceeded at once to Northampton."

Miss Avesford protested loudly against the suggestion. "What did Miss Pennington or Mr. Harpsden know of the wishes of Sir John? —What authority had either of them to interfere?"—

Olave Harpsden made no reply.—He seemed

unconscious of her presence.—Her worst anathema would have made no more impression on his mind than the painted thunderbolt in the hands of St. Michael in the mis-matched old window, pretending to be stained glass, in the mouldy church of Harrals.

"Have I your authority to send to Hurdiston for a fly?" said he to his cousin.—"It is the only conveyance to be had."

With similar disregard of all constituted authorities, Janetta eagerly acquiesced; and Mr. Harpsden accordingly left the room.

"You are surely not about to defy all parental authority, Miss Wraysbury, and travel in a hired conveyance to twenty miles' distance, in company with a comparative stranger?"—said the governess, wearied by a long day's travel, and hungering after the excellent dinner that doubtless awaited them.

"I am going to my father, dear Miss Avesford,—I am going to my father!" was all that her agitated pupil could find breath to answer.

It was now dusk,—more than dusk. She had taken no sustenance since day-dawn.—Her voice was husky from weakness,—her countenence haggard from fatigue.—Yet so unmistakeable is the manifestation of a steadfast human will, that the woman she had rarely disobeyed, saw it was useless to argue with her.

When the fly was announced as in waiting, Miss Avesford quietly followed her into it, as if their relative positions were changed. — Mr. Harpsden, who had silently offered his arm to his cousin, mounted beside the driver on the box, so that no servant could have found place for attendance. — A singular equipage for the heiress of millions, proceeding to what she feared might be the death-bed of her father!

Not a word was spoken on the road. The governess, wearied out of her life, slept profoundly. Janetta dozed at intervals, along the dark, dreary road; ever and anon wakened with

a start by some painful perception,—some new terror,—some dread of evil to come.

The anguish she had undergone during the last few hours, seemed to have utterly effaced the distance, created by his coldness, between herself and her father. She was prepared to throw herself into his arms,—to beseech his pardon for the involuntary offences of which she might have been guilty,—to be unto him as a little child,—as his own Netta of Maple Hill.—But the longer their journey, and the nearer she approached his presence, the more these excited feelings became tranquillised. Her awe of him returned. By the time they reached the last turnpike, Netta had subsided again into "Miss Wraysbury."

Through the crowd surrounding the gateway of the hotel, she was marshalled without a word spoken, but with the careful assiduity of a brother, by her cousin Olave:—the governess, thanks to her stalwart form and sturdy elbows, closely following; already rehearsing the ha-

rangue she was about to wreak upon the presuming young gentleman in the rusty coat.

But alas! when she had made her way, escorted by a curtseying hostess and legion of waiters, into the well-lighted hall, Mr. Harpsden had wholly disappeared; and her half-fainting charge, clinging heavily to the balusters, was slowly ascending the stairs towards the apartments of Sir John.

Her own long-winded, well-worded inquiries after his condition, were satisfactorily answered. "Sir John was a shade better." But the words were so cautiously spoken, and accompanied by looks so solemn, that danger was clearly implied.—

Left alone in a state sitting-room, to wait for Janetta's return, the poor hungry governess was thoroughly out of her element; no instructions to give,—no reprehensions to utter. —After she had spoiled an excellent fire by endeavouring to improve it, and spelled the names under the gorgeously-framed engravings, gracing

"Without even consulting me!" was the interjectional reply.

"Miss Wraysbury, madam, is so completely taken up with attendance on Sir John, that I was forced to take the arrangement on myself."

Boadicea was either pacified, or too hungry to persist in her heroic vein in addressing the waiter.

"Since I am to dine alone, then, sir," said she, "let no further time be lost.—Bring dinner."—

He disappeared in a moment: and five minutes afterwards, a cover having been hastily laid, the inevitable tarnished silver tureen of opaque oxtail soup was brought in by a head waiter, so far more dignified of aspect than the previous intruder, that she felt as if, in the first instance, due respect had not been paid her.

Her choice was now deferentially requested between pale sherry and brown.

"His lordship had ordered dinner; but had referred them to herself respecting wine."

"His lordship?"—echoed Miss Avesford, a little surprised.

"Lord Dinton, madam,—the Earl of Dinton —who left you just now," explained the waiter, fearing, from her puzzled looks, that the lady might be dizzy with long fasting.

Dizzy or not, her appetite was already destroyed by consciousness of her want of courtesy. To conceal her embarrassment, she began to cross-question the attendants concerning the mischances of Sir John.

It appeared that, towards the close of the poll, the preceding day, much ill-feeling had disturbed the hustings.—In the struggle, several persons were thrown down, trampled upon, and seriously injured.—A procession, bearing on a shutter the body of a dead child, (which, as was afterwards proved, was not a victim to the scuffle,) paraded the town. At length, when it transpired that a messenger had been despatched by the inspector of the police force to the barracks, requiring the aid of a company of infantry,

stones and other missiles began to be thrown: by one of which, Sir John Wraysbury was struck down. For some hours, he had remained insensible; and even yet, consciousness was only partially restored.—Till the results of the concussion had been ascertained, Dr. Gardiner, his privileged torturer, declared that, he could not be said to be out of danger.

## CHAPTER IV.

For the four whole days ensuing, Janetta scarcely quitted the dressing-room adjoining her father's sick chamber; though for the greater part of the first two, he remained unconscious of her arrival.—It was, of course, avouched by his surgical attendants, according to the established rule in such cases, that had the blow been struck an eighth of an inch higher or lower, it must have been fatal.—As it was, there was reason to fear that, besides the scalp wound, a deposit had been formed under the contusion, which still threatened perilous consequences.

The result was an immense reaction in favour of the new member. For member he was. While he still lay helpless and as one dead, the result of the poll was declared to be in his favour to an amount which rendered the persistance of the murderous party by which he had been assailed, as absurd as it was factious.

Perhaps they were conscious of their error; for at least as many of them crowded to the door of the hotel to examine the bulletins hourly perceived on its gate-posts, as of his own partizans. A Great Briton is said to be by nature cold and phlegmatic; but once warmed up, and freely massed with his kind, he blazes like camphine. Had Sir John Wraysbury died of his wound on the night of gaining his election, he would probably have been publicly buried at the cost of the county, and canonized afterwards; though what he had ever done to merit the loud huzzas shouted in his honour, or the post-obit articles already in type for him in the obituary, nay, in the leaders of more than

one of the daily papers, it would be hard to say. —A moderately good speech or two at Agricultural Meetings, promising more hereafter, and the amount of his annual income, were the sole authentic traits cited in his panegyric.

But John Bull has long been accustomed to praise himself, as a lover of fair-play; and lapidation is the act of a ruffian, even in a contested election. The cry of "cheap bread" died away in the distance; for the populace had become deeply concerned for the new M.P., when they learned how many doctors were in attendance. But when the news transpired in the town and neighbourhood that his beautiful daughter was also in attendance,—his only daughter,—his heiress-daughter,— captivating the hearts of all who witnessed her filial devotion, the popularity of the suffering man rose to fever-heat. They now admitted that if he died, the verdict over his remains must be "Wilful Murder;" and could he have been elected over again, not a voter but would have

given him a plumper. Expresses were constantly coming in from the Committees of the different towns which had supported him, bearing anxious inquiries; and almost every Abbey, Castle, Hall, Lodge, and Park in the shire had its groom in saddle, to ascertain at least once a day that the representation of the county was not again vacant.

But all this time Janetta was leading a life of torment.—To her, all these inquiries, all this factitious popularity served but as a stimulant to her fears.—Her father's sufferings,—her father's danger had taken possession of every faculty of her mind.

The only thing real, throughout the whole business, in fact, except the peril of the patient from severe medical attendance, was the deep affliction of his child.—The ties of nature had been drawn stringently closer by the fear of losing him; and when Dr. Gardiner, the leading practitioner in attendance, announced to her that her father was thoroughly out of danger, to

his amazement and consternation, she fainted on the spot.

Of all this, Sir John was at present imperfectly aware. He knew not how many nights she had watched; or how many of her meals had been removed untasted. Still he had seen enough of her gentle attendance by his bedside, to love her as he had never loved her before. He had accepted her as she was represented to him by the governess, as a young lady of amiable disposition and tolerable capacity, but sorely deficient in reasoning powers, and with several courses of ancient and modern history still to go through. But he now saw with his own eyes, that Netta, his child, his darling, was the devoted Maria over again; — Maria, younger, fairer, and more intelligent.—He began to look forward to his recovery, more with the hope of brightening her future life and securing her happiness, than of taking the seat in parliament, which had well nigh cost him so dear.

Already, Miss Avesford discerned that her

kingdom was taken from her. The great oracle of Lynchcombe had suddenly become "*Dodone inconsultée*,"—and instead of bewildering the mind of her pupil by her logic and learning, she was forced to sit yawning away her lonely day, re-contemplating "John Knox" and "Basing House." But that, fortunately, she discovered on the console beside the dusty decanter, a shabby dog's-eared volume of Mill, (left behind by an American traveller,) and having rushed into its pages, lost her way in them as a guide-disclaiming adventurer of our acquaintance in the catacombs, whence he never emerged, and where he is probably groping to this hour, her brain-pan might perhaps have exploded, like a boiler deprived of its usual supply of water.

But there was a silent spectator of Miss Wraysbury's filial devotion far more watchful and quite as kindly disposed towards her, as the wounded man. Lord Dinton, who, from the moment of the injury till the new member was declared out of danger, had taken up his abode in

the hotel, was deeply struck by the tenderness of feeling evinced by that young girl, in whom he felt a sort of vested interest, as the niece of Bessy Pennington and daughter of poor Maria, and as bearing in her countenance attestation of both relationships; the mild gray eye, so readily softening to tears;—the glossy hair,—the noiseless footstep,—the graceful bend. To look at, she exhibited as fair a specimen as might be of feminine nature; to listen to, the confiding artlessness of a child.

"The sweetest creature I ever saw," was his account of her to her aunt, when he was at length at liberty to ride over to Denny Cross; "good and unpretending as any farmer's lass in the county, and lovely as her poor mother."

"How proud her grandfather would have been of her," murmured Bessy, musing aloud. "From the moment she was born, Netta was a sort of idol to him.—He never cared about either of the boys, perhaps because they re-

sembled their father more than his darling Maria."

"Even over her father," added Lord Dinton, "I have a notion that charming girl will exercise a highly advantageous influence."

Bessy shook her head. The experience of twenty years rendered her incredulous. The reforms which Maria and Sophy had been unable to effect, were scarcely likely to be accomplished by a girl of eighteen.

Lord Dinton pleaded the sympathy of kindred blood, as stronger than that of even wedlock.

"It may be so, dearest, in *your* case," said Miss Pennington, with a half reproachful smile; "but remember how Sir John disobeyed his father and threw off his sisters, out of love for mine."

"I'm afraid he's a man without very warm sympathies of any kind," rejoined Lord Dinton, frankly,—"an egotist in his way;—not a prating one;—not a man who *talks* about himself, but who thinks of nothing else:—the worst

kind of egotist, perhaps, for the prater is voted a bore, and put down by general acclamation."

Bessy did not quite understand him. But she did what renders a pretty woman so much more charming than a wise one,—she smiled acquiescence.

"It is a terrible ordeal for a selfish man to fall suddenly into the enjoyment of enormous wealth," added Lord Dinton; "and I admit that Wraysbury was unequal to the shock Farmer declares there ought to be a preparatory malady, like vaccination, to prepare a man's constitution for taking the Mammon-fever mildly."

"I am sure *his* nature has not been injured by his riches," said Bessy.

"Because they came upon him progressively, and, thanks to his own exertions; in gentle spring showers,—not in a water-spout.—All I trust is, that when Netta becomes aware of her position as an heiress, she will not lose her charming artlessness of character. If I did not

so utterly detest intermarriages between cousins, I would give much to see her become the wife of our Edgar.—Edgar is a spirited, honest young fellow, who would do justice to her and her millions."

"Sir John would never hear of it," said Bessy.—"His dislike of Mrs. Molyneux amounts almost to vindictiveness. But to talk already of a marriage of any kind for dear little Netta! —A mere child!—She has not yet got rid of her governess!"

"She will, soon, I fancy; though Wraysbury has taken it into his head that a duenna of some kind or other is indispensable for a girl about to be placed at the head of such an establishment."

"And surely he is right?"

"Not when the heart and head are so trustworthy as those of our dear little niece. And then, what right has he to impose such a nuisance upon society, as a pedant in petticoats?"

"Miss Avesford seems to have done great justice to his daughter."

"And in return, he ought to do great justice to *her*. Let him give her an annuity of three hundred a year for life, and leisure to immortalise herself by compiling a dictionary of Political Economy,—the subject which just now occupies all the cells of her busy brain,—a penitentiary where she imprisons young ideas in solitary confinement."

Again Bessy Pennington smiled what seemed to be comprehension and approval.

"Such an enfranchisement will be the best thing in the world for her," resumed Lord Dinton. "Even if Wraysbury chose to enthrone her in his own drawing-room, he could not expect people to invite her in return. Half the women of his acquaintance would tremble to open their lips in her presence, for fear of lapses in their geography or subjunctive mood; and he has no right to place a highly respectable woman, who deserves all possible consideration at his hands,

in so false a position.—Even Netta, right-thinking and right-feeling as she is, would regard her less if she saw her a mere object of toleration."

"On the contrary," rejoined Bessy, "Netta, who I believe has always feared her too much to be very fond of her, would warm towards her the moment she thought her injured."

It was now Lord Dinton's turn to smile approvingly. "You are right," said he. "Women are the best judges of the feelings of women. —However, I shall allow Wraysbury no peace till he has pensioned off his Minerva.—I want to see free scope of thought and action allowed to my dear niece."

Among many other reasons why Lord Dinton rejoiced to find that Sir John Wraysbury, on this point, coincided in his views, was his fear of exposing the new disciple of Mill to the quizzing of his nephew. — Edgar Molyneux, though as genial in disposition as a summer morning, seldom resisted his tendency to a joke, no matter at whose expense; and Lord

Dinton foresaw that, in the present depressed state of his family circle at the Castle, the young Oxonian would not only resort to Harrals for recreation, but find a butt in the anything but cerulean blue of Professor Avesford.

For already it was settled that, at Harrals, the father and daughter were to pass the winter. The nerves of Sir John were seriously shaken by his severe sufferings; and he naturally clung to the medical attendants whom he believed to have saved his life, and the kind friend who had so gratuitously devoted himself to his sick-bed.—To remove out of reach of advice from Dr. Gardiner or Lord Dinton, was out of the question.

The county, too,—the county which had so flatteringly entered into his wrongs, and lamented his headaches, deserved some token of gratitude.—And very gratifying to him was it to find accordingly, that a sojourn at Harrals, which he regarded as a matter of duty, was the thing in the world most desired by his daughter.

—As to Harry, who was about to spend with them the Christmas holidays of his thirteenth year, provided Jack Frost respected his hunting, or afforded him skaiting in exchange, he cared very little in what county the winter was to be enjoyed.—Sir John, who had hitherto entertained a sort of grudging apprehension of establishing himself at the family seat, lest his son and heir should already take upon himself, as the future Woolston of Harrals, had little idea how rarely such mercenary calculations enter into the mind of a schoolboy: — the week's pocket-money,— a new pony,—or a gold watch,—generally forming the limit of his covetousness.—It is only grown-up people whose hearts are hard enough to contemplate, without a shudder, inheritings to be derived from the death of a fellow-creature.

Meanwhile, the removal of the convalescent member from Northampton to Harrals, had almost the air of an ovation.—Five weeks had elapsed since the day which so nearly decreed

his doom; and the popular favour created by his martyrdom, kept fresh and vivid by liberal ale-spill and expenditure of money, seemed to pursue him to his home; for he was welcomed more like a victor returning to his dominion after the conquest of a new province, than a country baronet having just paid for his seat in parliament by the loss of several stone of flesh, —by an apothecary's bill, the sheets of which would have papered the Town Hall,—and by the disarrangement of his nervous system for the remainder of his days.

Still, it would have been difficult not to enjoy on that bright December day, the sense of release from a sick room, and the company of the happy girl by his side —Never in her days had Janetta felt so joyous. Her father had expressed himself so kindly on finding her seated by his side, with the horses' heads turned homewards!—The cheers of the people were nothing, compared with those few murmured words of affection.

And then, Miss Avesford was already off to Lynchcombe, to collect her property preparatory to her final resignation of the mace and seals; and about to spend the winter in Edinburgh, with an old fellow-labourer in the fields of tuition, now appropriately married to a learned geologist and interpreter of fossil remains.—After thankfully accepting the proffered emolument, she had hurried her departure, to avoid exposing her disappointment to the scorn of her old enemy the housekeeper.

"I wish Dinton could have accompanied us to day," said Sir John, as the carriage turned into the lodge-gates, and the fine sweep of the old park lay before them,—presenting, with its plantations of evergreens, its fine old fir-trees almost rivalling cedars in their droop and verdure, and the stately oaks still retaining their tawny foliage, while here and there, in sheltered situations, a scarlet tinge still clung tenaciously to some favoured beech,—a noble winter landscape.

The old place, in short, received them smilingly; and Janetta could not but confirm her father's verdict, that after all, our chilly climate and habits of hybernating in the country, render red brick walls more acceptable to an English eye, than the finest stone façade.

"The grey stone quadrangle at Molyneux Castle looks like a prison, compared with this cheerful place," said he, graciously, as they entered the court-yard, with its stately cedars. "Yes,—I wish Dinton could have been here. But he wished to remain at home, in order to receive your cousin."

"My cousin ?" repeated Netta, with a bewildered look;—recurring almost for the first time since her father's illness, to the good service she had received at cousinly hands. And she forthwith began explaining to Sir John that the last time she entered that court-yard, her cousin had met her at the portal.

It was now Sir John Wraysbury's turn to look bewildered.

"You are dreaming, my darling," said he. "At the time of my election, Edgar Molyneux was in Switzerland.—Edgar never was at Harrals in his life."

"I was not thinking of Mr. Molyneux, papa. Him I have not seen since I was a little girl, and he used to punish me by corking mustachios on my doll. I was talking of Olave."

"Of young Harpsden?—How, on earth, my dear child, came you acquainted with such a person!"

"By mere accident, papa."

"I trust so.—His odious father is married again, and we never meet."

All further allusion to the subject was interrupted, just then, by their stopping at the hall-door; where, under the unprecedented circumstances of a return from the grave, the heads of the household had thought it their duty to assemble:—the fat housekeeper,—the presbyterian-looking house-steward,—the portly, well-dressed butler, looking like a thriving Lombard

Street banker; besides footmen enough to variegate the sombre dignity of the Upper House.

Sir John accepted the offer of Janetta's arm to enter the house; more for the pleasure of leaning upon it, than from any further necessity for support.—Pausing, for a moment, in the well-proportioned marble hall, rendered warm as an inner chamber by flues and Turkey carpets, he pointed to an organ placed half way up the double ascent of stairs.

"One of the few relics of the old mansion, Netta!" said he. "I retained it because your dear mother played upon it, during her only visit to Harrals. Your mother was fond of the organ, and excelled in Handel."

Such a reminiscence, his daughter was thankful to him for evoking; for her own thoughts were occupied at that moment with recollections of her ill-starred arrival, and of the dreadful suspense she had endured in the splendid drawing-room they were entering; which looked

*now* as if care could not find a place in the spot.

The winter sun was streaming gaily in; and though the side windows were occupied by *jardinières*, containing flowers whose brilliant variety could alone have put to shame those represented on the glowing Sallandrouze carpets, the middle one, the vast turret lantern forming the centre of the frontage, was left clear to command, on all sides, the beautiful home-views of the park.—Close below, lay the balustraded terrace, with its chain of parterres, even at that advanced season, bright with groups of many-coloured crysanthemums, and the blossoms, white and purple, of the New Zealand veronica. Further on, the waters of the Nene glittered their way across the turf.

Never had Sir John surveyed that pleasant scene, the home allotted by Providence to him and his, with emotions so becoming.—Grateful that his life had been spared, he was doubly grateful that it was given him to enjoy posses-

sions so unexceptionable, in company with an affectionate child. The clear blue skies over-head, with their softening fleece-like clouds, seemed to have acquired a new meaning in his sight.

"Don't you think, papa, that Mrs. Dysart and Helmsley will be hurt if you do not address a word to them?" insinuated Miss Wraysbury, little suspecting the stir of feeling which had kept her father silent as he crossed his threshold.

"I am a little overtired by my drive, my dear," said he, creeping from the blaze of daylight towards a snug sofa beside the fireplace; ashamed, how mistakenly, that even Janetta should perceive the moisture gathered in his eyes.

"By and by, then?—You would be pleased with them if you knew half the anxiety they have shown during your illness."

But no opportunity was afforded of resisting her request. After a slight tap at the door, Mrs. Dysart came rustling in, armed with her

privilege of office; a salver, namely, containing a cup of well-frothed chocolate, and a warm jelly, for the selection of the invalid.—Her face was broad with smiles; as easily attributed to the convalescence of her beloved master, as to the discomfited exit of her rival, the lady of lexicons.

Sir John, not in the mood for being coddled, satisfied the touchiness of the triumphant housekeeper, by inflicting the chocolate on his daughter. —Then, wishing to be alone, feeling the presence of even Janetta a tax upon his emotions, he bad Mrs. Dysart conduct Miss Wraysbury to her own apartments, which she had not yet seen.

"I should be glad, my dear," said he, as she quitted the room, "to find that you approved of what I have prepared for you."

Strange if she had not!—for never was a prettier suite designed or executed:—the simple white chintz hangings and Axminster carpets, alike sprigged with a green fern-like leaf, without a vestige of gilding or finery; and nothing to

be seen but highly varnished maple.—" Quite chaste and unpretending," as Mrs. Dysart musingly observed ;—" quite a young lady's apartment."

It did not occur to her, it did not even occur to the " young lady" as remarkable, that though no single room in the vast mansion at Lynchcombe was especially appropriated to her use, or dignified by her name, here, at Harrals, in which she had comparatively so small an interest, a suite had been from the first, even in the architect's plan, specifically assigned her. Still less would Netta Wraysbury have imagined, had the peculiarity been pointed out, that it arose from the jealousy unwittingly cherished by her father ; —the question of *meum* and *tuum* ever active in his mercenary mind. There, Lynchcombe prominently represented her interests ; and Harrals, those of the future baronet.—And whereas at Harrals, she must always remain a guest, her accommodation had been suitably provided for.

## CHAPTER V.

"If you felt well enough to be left alone for a couple of hours, dear papa," said Netta, (on finding, the following day, that her father was desirous of an interview with his head bailiff concerning some farms for which improvements had been submitted to him previous to the election and its disastrous results,)—"as I know you will not want me during your business with Walkingham, I should be glad to drive over to Denny Cross. I ought to lose no time in waiting upon my grandfather."

"But, my dearest child, he will not so much

as recognize you. Dinton tells me, that for the last six months, Mr. Pennington has not even known his daughter."

"But Aunt Bessy will recognize me; and she would be hurt if her father were neglected."

"Better wait till they are both established at Molyneux Castle," replied the invalid, peevishly.

"But *that* will not be for months?"

"I shall use my endeavours to make it weeks. —Bessy Pennington should not be allowed to prolong that excellent man's probation from mere punctilio!"

"Surely the marriage ought not to take place during a deep family mourning?—Such a disrespect to the memory of the late lord!"

Sir John Wraysbury knew well that it ought not, and would not. But he felt a strong repugnance to the idea of his beautiful daughter introduced into the dingy, threadbare parlour at Denny Cross. With its narrow windows of flawy green-tinted glass, and meagre luncheon-tray, it was no place for the heiress of Lynchcombe.

"At all events," added he, "wait till I am able to bear you company."

"A strong temptation, certainly," said Netta, —placing her hand fondly on his, which, wasted and feeble, lay on the library table. "But we can go again, then, papa;—*then*, I trust, and often. But to-day, I feel as if the drive would do me good; and it would be such a pleasant surprise to Aunt Bessy!"

Sir John struggled against his disinclination. But it would have been too hard to refuse the first petition of his dutiful daughter. That she might be enabled to return by the time he had wrangled with Walkingham over the number of barns and malthouses to be completed for Farmer Kelly according to the tenour of his new lease, the carriage was instantly ordered; and Janetta, mantled and furred to the teeth, soon found herself in the barouche she had chosen for the drive; whose fast trotting bays required far less than an hour to convey her to Denny Cross.

It was the first time in her life she had ever found herself alone in an open carriage, confronting the refreshing air and falling back upon her own pleasant cogitations; and she decided it to be as agreeable as the postchaise and pair bowling along a good road, which Dr. Johnson declared to be the greatest luxury in life.

If poor in cheering reminiscences, Janetta had now such a happy future to dwell upon!—her father so softened towards her; — her time henceforward her own;—close neighbourship secured with her nearest relations;—Harry about to spend his first holidays in his new home;—and to crown all, the Farmers promising an early spring visit, as soon as the delicate health of their adopted child would allow them to leave Torquay.

And then, in addition to the home circle, such hosts of neighbours had overwhelmed her with gracious messages.—So many friends seemed awaiting her;—so many attractive occupations, in the charming drawing-room prepared by her

father's kindness for her use. Her heart was as gay as the song of the robins whistling in the hedgerows as she passed.

At one moment, the pace of the horses slackened, and the footman on the box, touching his hat, looked back with an interrogative air, as if waiting for orders. But no orders were forthcoming.

Miss Wraysbury was in a brown study; if that can be called brown, which was decidedly *couleur de rose.* The coachman had merely checked his horses, she thought, to avoid running over some hedgers and ditchers, who were working by the road-side, overlooked by a jolly farmer and his son; the former in dirty spatter-dashes, the latter in a rough shooting-jacket; both, in wide-awakes of a highly unbecoming form and colour.

Janetta, however, formed a less circumstantial judgment of their demerits. All she noticed of the group was a very handsome dog,—lurcher, sheep-dog, or deer-hound.—Had the owners

been of the Groby Abbey order, she would have guessed the latter; if she had met them at nightfall,—the former. But as they were evidently respectable farmers, the handsome bright-eyed, prick-eared animal was probably the guardian of their fold.

Her reverie was dissipated, ten minutes afterwards, by the opening of the old sun-blistered hall-door of Denny Cross, and being folded in the arms of a lady in deep mourning, whose head Janetta overtopped a little, while fondly held in her embrace.

"Darling Aunt Bessy!" was her sole response to the sobs of the happy woman who had stolen out to meet her in the hall, that her tears, wrung forth by surprise and delight, might fall unnoted; or perhaps,—for in the truest of female hearts prudery will find a lurking corner,—perhaps to avoid being discovered in the old parlour *tête-à-tête* with her plighted love!

For there on their entrance, sat, or rather stood, Lord Dinton; who advanced towards Janetta

with extended arms, as if he too intended to come in for his share of the embracing. He imprinted, in fact, on her fair forehead a grave kiss ; which Miss Avesford would probably have termed "an avuncular salute," and which Janetta received with gratitude.

"Good girl,—good dear girl!" said he, cordially.—"I knew it would not be long before we saw you here ; though, as I was just telling Bessy, she must not be disappointed if the visit were put off for a day or two. I knew it would not be so easily accomplished as she might suppose."

"Papa was very kind about it," said Janetta, readily understanding to what species of difficulty he referred. And she immediately changed the subject, by answering questions which Miss Pennington had not yet found breath to ask, concerning the progress of Sir John towards recovery.

"He is doing even better than we could have hoped," said she, "and his first visit, when

he is able to drive out without fatigue, will be to Denny Cross.—To-day, I have only a very short leave of absence. But I so much,—so very much—wanted to see you again!"

On which assurance, poor Bessy had more trouble than ever in moderating her tears.

"How tall you are grown, Netta!"—were the first words she could command. "No scampering on ponies or clambering up cherry-trees, now, darling!"—she added, leaning back from her niece to contemplate the gracefulness of her proportions.

"It is well for you both," rejoined Lord Dinton, smiling, "that Miss Avesford is in Dorsetshire, out of hearing of such crimes and misdemeanours."

But the aunt and niece were already busy with Harry's impending visit to Harrals. "I have not seen him these six years," said Miss Pennington; "not since he was a mere child.—Whom does he resemble?"

"My father's family, I have been told. And

I noticed a look of him in my cousin, Olave Harpsden, which confirms the opinion."

"I could not hope that all of you would resemble my poor sister," said Aunt Bessy, with another tearful glance at her niece, at whose entreaty she now quitted the room, to ascertain whether the poor old squire was awake, and able to receive them.

"You did well to come at once, Janetta," said Lord Dinton, when she had quitted the room, and he was left alone with Miss Wraysbury.—"I was afraid there would be some hesitation about breaking the ice between your father and this house. But, once broken, we must not allow the warm current of nature to freeze again."

Janetta contented herself in reply with an affirmative gesture. Her heart was throbbing within her. A strange sound seemed whistling in her ears. She was a little awe-struck at the prospect of approaching the presence of her grandfather: the old man to whom she owed

both love and duty, but whose mind and body were deprived of half their vitality.—The idea of the paralytic man appalled her. She had seen such objects only in Scripture pictures, and cuts in the old family Bible. Her spirits sank within her, as, leaning on Aunt Bessy's arm, she ascended the creaking old stairs.

"My father is dozing," whispered Miss Pennington, as they entered the dingy room, from which a venerable attendant disappeared by a side-door. And Netta was instantly struck by the gloomy aspect of the obsolete four-post bed, of dark mahogany, scantily hung with plain green serge, which, as Bessy long afterwards explained to her, had been the resting-place for half a century of the squire, who disliked all changes and innovations; so much so, that a fac-simile of this cumbrous and shabby piece of furniture had been already withdrawn for his use from the lumber-room of Molyneux Castle, lest he should perceive the smallest alteration in his mode of life.

He was asleep as they approached the bedside; that is, his hollow eyes were closed, and his long, silvery hair lay motionless on the pillow.—But though neither his daughter nor his granddaughter uttered a word, nay, scarcely breathed a breath, lest they should disturb him, a sort of inward consciousness seemed to apprise him of their presence. Slowly raising his eyelids, he fixed an inexpressive stare on the young stranger; and, after a moment or two, uttered a sort of incoherent muttering, to interpret which, Bessy bent down her head over his pillow. But already, the quicker ear of his granddaughter had caught the sound:—"Maria—Maria—Maria."—Struck by her likeness to her mother, he fancied that his poor daughter stood before him.

Janetta, deeply moved, almost fancied that she could discern a smile upon the old man's sunken features, as he made this mistaken recognition. But she deceived herself. A portion of the curtain having been drawn aside by

his attendant previous to quitting the room, a single dancing sunbeam found its way into the sombre bed, and brightened with seeming intelligence the soul-less face of the paralytic man.

But as if in furtherance of his error, Miss Wraysbury bent her knee beside him, even as his Maria might have done, and stedfastly and dutifully contemplated the wreck of one so reverenced. She felt as if looking upon him for the last time. The spark of life, already so dim and waning, must soon, *very* soon, be extinguished.

Miss Pennington at length raised her from her position, and gently led her from the room, that she might have time to recover herself and wipe away her tears, ere she prepared for departure. But though a draught of cold water in some measure relieved the oppression of her breath, her countenance still bore traces of the deepest emotion, when she returned to the parlour.

Unfortunately; for strangers were present.—Loud and merry voices assailed her the moment Aunt Bessy opened the door; and but that she was already within it, gladly would she have receded, and escaped. But the two men she had seen on the road, who, to her surprise, were familiarly seated on either side the fire, started up to welcome her; and by the elder one, to her still greater astonishment, she was roughly embraced.

"So, Mistress Netta," said the hearty voice of her uncle Hugh, "because you were riding in a fine carriage, just now, you didn't choose, forsooth, to be seen on the queen's highway, chatting with your farmer uncle?—Come to the light, and let me have a look at you!"—Then, perceiving by her reluctance and her swollen eyelids that she had scarcely recovered from recent emotion, the good-breeding imparted by a good heart, prompted him to relinquish his hold. Having placed her in a chair, he began to converse with his sister.

"You should have sent for us, Bessy," said he. "It was a mere chance that made me acquainted with my niece's visit. And it would have vexed me beyond measure to miss her."

"The pleasure was so unexpected, that I own I lost all thought of any thing but those present," replied Miss Pennington,—still flushed and agitated.

"So you often do, now, Aunt Bessy," added the younger intruder,—(who, now his wide-awake was removed, exhibited fine manly features, and one of the pleasantest countenances in the world,)—glancing significantly, as he spoke, towards Lord Dinton, as if joining in the general desire to avert attention from Miss Wraysbury's distress.—"Luckily, the Minister of Public Works at Denny Cross pretended to have business with his drainers; which took us idling and gossiping along the high road; where we were rewarded for our sins as though they were virtues."

By this time, Janetta was sufficiently herself to turn towards him with a smile.

"My cousin Edgar, I am certain!" said she.

"Yes,—your cousin Edgar," he replied, shaking her frankly offered hand.—"I am glad to find you recognise him by the profound nature of his philosophy.—Do you remember, Netta, the last day I spent with you in Carlton Gardens, when we were both urchins, endeavouring to box my ears, because I persisted in calling you Miss W. W.? And how Miss Avesford gave you 'Birds in their little nests agree' to learn, as a punishment for being a vixen?"

"I remember thinking you very rude and disagreeable," said Janetta, blushing at having so undignified an incident re-called to her recollection, though but in the presence of a family party.

"And so I was:—because such a fuss was made about you; and because I was enjoined to treat you with so much consideration.—My governor and mother, knowing that they

were not exactly objects of adoration to Sir John, were afraid the offences of their offspring might perpetuate the breach. So Theo. and I were lectured on the eve of every visit to his house, till we hated it like physic.—It was such a consolation to break the playthings, and put up the monkey of Miss W. W.!"

"Not Theodosia.—Theo. was always indulgent and generous," said Netta, reproachfully. "And when we meet again, I am sure she will find something kinder to greet her poor cousin with, than reminiscences of early quarrels."

"And so should I, were not my poor cousin my *rich* cousin," said Edgar, a little startled by her rebuke.—"But let us make friends now, dear Netta, and keep so:—that is, if the constituted authorities will allow you to be on friendly terms with a scrub like myself."

"Don't believe a word he says, Netta," cried uncle Hugh, patting her somewhat roughly on the back. "His modesty is mere sham. Not a lad in the county thinks half so highly of

himself:—for which, however, nobody's to blame but ourselves, who have been spoiling him for the last half-dozen years, till he fancies himself our top-sawyer,—crack shot—and best seat across country. Nay, he sometimes calls himself the best rod and gun in England, Wales, or the Highlands.—Don't you, Edgar?"

"There, or thereabouts," replied young Molyneux, laughing, after having effected another shake-hands of reconciliation with his pretty cousin. "But why don't you add, 'and the best-looking dog in Oxford?'—your usual summing up of my imputed sins and follies!"

"Because in that respect, my dear boy, you are mending," added the jovial Hugh. "You came back from chamois-hunting, t'other day, so confoundedly tanned and ugly, that even *your* self-conceit couldn't stand out against the plain-speaking of your looking-glass."

"If it have survived your chaffing, it might defy any thing!" retorted Edgar, good-humouredly.—"Will you believe it, Miss Wraysbury"—

"Netta, if you please," interrupted his cousin.

"Will you believe, dear Netta, that when you passed us, just now on the road, I was endeavouring to enlighten his country-gentleman-like mind, by assuring him that his draining pipes were constructed on unscientific principles; whereupon he bade me stick to short pipes and pigtail,—the only pipes I was likely to have heard of at Christchurch.—As if my uncle Dinton had not long made my vacations miserable by cramming me with barn-yard learning, to qualify me for becoming a member of his beloved Agricultural Society."

Struck by the sound of his own name, Lord Dinton, who had been conversing in a low tone with Miss Pennington concerning her niece's interview with her poor old grandfather, now interposed.

"If you allow that chatterbox to get the start of you in conversation, Janetta," said he, "he will never let you get in a word."

"Again, my bad bringing-up!" cried Edgar, laughing. "You are such taciturn people at the Castle, that I am forced to talk for the whole Molyneux family."

He was rattling on; but the antiquated time-piece in the hall, in a voice hoarse and hollow as the striking of a clock in a melodrama, reminded Miss Wraysbury that her time had more than expired. She started up in a moment; and her farewell was cheered by warm entreaties that she would soon and often return.

"You have seen nothing to-day of the old place, Netta," said uncle Hugh, as he placed her in the carriage. "When you come again, you must visit the root-house to which I used to carry you on my shoulder, when Woolston and my poor sister were in Germany, and you were the life and delight of Denny Cross."

Little did he dream how often, amidst the cold magnificence of Lynchcombe, and the resonant lectures of the patent governess, his

pretty niece had yearned in her reveries after that old root-house, and uncle Hugh, and aunt Sophy, and the unlimited indulgence she had enjoyed in her mother's homely home!

On her arrival at Harrals, she found her father chilly and peevish. Most country gentlemen are so, after a long interview with their bailiff;—who is apt to make their heart bleed with tales of agricultural distress, and their pockets bleed for the means of repairing it.—But though Sir John imputed his poorliness to his first attempt at the transaction of business, it arose entirely from vexation at Janetta's precipitate visit to Denny Cross. Convinced that his connection with the spot had been the bane of his life,—had circumscribed his sphere, and overclouded his early manhood,—he saw no reason why his daughter should entangle herself so closely in a knot of unsatisfactory relationships. Two uncles struggling in Australia, and a squire never heard of out of his own parish, were drawbacks upon the brilliancy of her pros-

pects. Molyneux Castle stood high enough to overlook such things. It was different with Harrals.

How much more would he have regretted Janetta's dutiful visit, had he surmised that the cousin Edgar, of whom she spoke so slightingly, nay, in a tone of pique, as a rattling egotist, was one of the handsomest young men in the kingdom; concealing under the exterior of a coxcomb, the most sterling qualities of heart and head!—Else would he not have been so dearly loved, either by Lord Dinton, or the simple-minded Hugh.—Else, he would have been more careful to make the best of himself.

Afraid of wounding her father's feelings by describing the affecting nature of her grandfather's recognition of his grandchild, she merely alluded to Mr. Pennington's condition as hopeless of amendment.

"And having satisfied yourself on that point, my dear," said Sir John, "and that he can derive no possible pleasure from seeing you, I

trust you will not always be wanting to drive over to Denny Cross. It would be a great annoyance to me; and I really cannot spare you. —I want you to read to me,—I want you to write for me,—I want you to converse with.— I feel quite giddy to-day, from having only endeavoured to run through the great letters of the 'Times.' Dr. Gardiner says that I must on no account exercise my eyes."—

Janetta's beamed with pleasure at this prospect of occupations which might not have been held particularly attractive by any other girl of her age. But she was so flattered at the idea of being useful; so gratified at the notion of being indispensable to her father!—It did not for a moment occur to her that her life of slavery was about to be renewed;—that even now, while he loved her so dearly, the domestic despot intended to retain the absolute command of her time,—her thoughts,—her projects.

## CHAPTER VI.

A DAY or two after the visit to Denny Cross, the fine open weather continuing, Sir John despatched his daughter, after breakfast, for a survey of the gardens and conservatories; while he enjoyed as much exercise as was allowed him, within doors, by a saunter up and down the sunny gallery of the south front; one of the most rational and pleasantest provisions against the climate borrowed by the new mansion from those of the olden time.—

Finding her absence long, and his steps weary, he paused, at length, to rest, in one of

the spacious window-seats; when lo! his eyes encountered a sight that dilated them with horror:—the Heiress of Lynchcombe, if not arm-in-arm, side by side, in the most familiar attitude, with as fine a young man as ever trod gravel or greensward!

They were still at some distance from the house, at the extremity of the grand alley; and as they slowly approached, he saw that they were engaged in earnest argument; that is, the hero was holding forth,—nay, apparently laying down the law; and the heroine, first dissenting by a gesture, and then assenting with a smile. —Never had he been so struck by his daughter's beauty and grace as at that moment:—because never had he seen her half so animated.

Just as they reached the terrace, he saw the young man, in whom, by this time, he recognized, with deep mortification, his nephew Edgar, —extend his hand towards Janetta, as if in supplication. And lo! after a moment or two of laughing denial, the young lady selected from

the bunch of hot-house flowers in her hand, a choicer blossom than the rest, and, apparently in compliance with the solicitation of her companion, bestowed it upon him. Sir John's only solace consisted in the fact, that it was placed ostentatiously in the button-hole of his nephew's coat: not secretly cherished, as if affecting an affair of sentiment.

As they had now entered the house, he made his way back, in no very complacent mood, to the sunny morning room he had quitted in the best of humours, scarcely an hour before; regretting chiefly that he had been so hasty in parting with Miss Avesford, and wondering whether a trust-worthy professional *dame de compagnie* existed out of the chapter of apocryphal animals.

"Papa, my cousin Edgar!"—was his daughter's cheerful announcement of his nephew, whose company she hoped would prove acceptable to the listless man, forbidden to read or exert himself. "I met him at the wicket on my way to the gardens, and have been giving him a glimpse

of fairy-land. The conservatory, though not half the size of the one at Lynchcombe, is twice as full of flowers."

"Grand conservatories are seldom full of flowers," observed Edgar, after receiving a tolerably gracious welcome from Sir John. "They are too lofty, and too uncertain of temperature; designed by architects, not by floriculturists. Ours at Molyneux Castle looks like a Walhalla, and grows nothing but fruit trees. At least I searched it through carefully this morning for a flower to offer to my cousin, and found nothing milder than a palm leaf."

His first word had told against him. "*Ours* at Molyneux Castle!" The *Ego et rex meus* of Wolsey was scarcely more presumptuous!—He, the son of a younger brother, whose elder was on the eve of marriage, to assert proprietorship in the family estate!

"A son worthy of Gerald Molyneux!" was the mental commentary of his uncle. "Well might Janetta pronounce him to be a coxcomb.

I must take care that she do not alter her opinion."

He was still more angry when Edgar, seating himself unbidden in his own favourite chair (how are visitors to surmise the favourite seat of host or hostess?)—began to do the honours of his house to him, cross-questioning him in the most affable manner concerning his accident, and offering him the best of medical advice.

"If my uncle Dinton had only thought proper to write to me," said he, extending his legs as if his boots were perfectly at home,—"I could so easily have been back in time for the election. And if I had been there, I am convinced no disturbance would have occurred.—My uncle is so little known to the populace, and unluckily so shy,—which *they* think proud; and Molyneux Castle has never been popular in the county. The old folks were dignified, silent people;—my aunts never very sociable.—My father was the only favourite with the people, which has ren-

dered me now familiar with them, and something of a favourite with their betters."

Sir John sat aghast.

"Even you, my dear uncle," continued the offender, "are a comparative stranger here. The neighbours have grown up since you married and renounced Harrals; and the county is huffy at your settling in Dorsetshire. An opposition and riot were therefore matters of course. —But I know my way to the vulnerable points of these people, and would have undertaken to make that discontented bear, the public, relax its hug,—rise on its hind legs in your honour, and caper a saraband."

Janetta, on whom the abhorrent looks of her father were not thrown away, kept secretly wondering what Miss Avesford would have thought and said of this flagrant specimen of the rising youth of Britain. Sir John contented himself with replying, as if he had not been listening to a syllable uttered by his nephew,—"Pray have you heard lately from your mother?" adding,

with the earnestness of an invalid beginning to be interested in such topics,—"Pray how are Molyneux and my sister in health?"

"As well as can be expected, under present circumstances," was the young gentleman's grave reply.

"The great age of the late Lord Dinton must, however, have long prepared them for the melancholy event which has recently taken place?"

"But the present Lord Dinton's age did not by any means prepare them for the melancholy event *about* to follow. After figuring for fourteen years,—(two apprenticeships, uncle!)—as heir-presumptive to a peerage, it is far from pleasant to sink into a collateral."

"The change does not appear to have affected your spirits, Edgar?" said Miss Wraysbury, cheerfully.

"Oh! *I* had been living behind the curtain; and was thoroughly up to the trap-doors and stage-tricks.—My excellent uncle never made a secret to *me* of his matrimonial intentions;

probably because satisfied that I should discover them, without his assistance."

"Then why not forewarn your parents?" observed Sir John, with a contemptuous smile.

"Because I saw no reason to bring them over to England for the purpose of disturbing the courtship and marriage of Cock Robin.—Why should not the best man in England become the happiest?—He has been devoting his life to create happiness for other people. His own turn is come at last."

At this observation, Janetta looked almost as much pleased as when bestowing upon him the tea-rose; and her evident approval of his opinions provoked Sir John to remark, "My sister Emma will scarcely thank you.—She was never very partial to Denny Cross. I have to thank *her* for being the first to notify to my father and mother, that engagement in the Pennington family which produced an irreparable breach between us."

"And yet, though after twenty years, you still

[illegible] me, uncle,
[illegible] wretched
[illegible] shrugging
[illegible]

[illegible] will be readily re-
[illegible] when they be-
[illegible] pleaded
[illegible] "She is so
[illegible] tone. "She is so
[illegible] humble."
[illegible] qualities are
[illegible] Countess
[illegible]

"They constitute a perfect woman, however," persisted Miss Wraysbury, "whether attired in ermine and brocade, or serge and calico."

"Fie, fie, my dearest cousin!" cried Edgar, with an air of superlative contempt. "Do not make it so clear that you have been grazing on the top of a Dorsetshire down, instead of completing your education in Carlton Gardens. Would you place in the scale such plebeian virtues as self-denial and self-devotion,—vigil in the fetid

hospital and activity in the noisy schoolroom, against the high-breeding of the choicer specimens of human nature, — *pâte tendre* instead of potter's clay?—I am ashamed of you!"

A little uncertain whether her cousin's flippancy were genuine or assumed, Janetta could entertain no doubt concerning her father's displeasure. He began to stir the fire, as a safety-valve for his ill-humour; hammering away upon the coals, as though to revenge himself, on something tangible. In hopes that Edgar would show to less disadvantage in discussing subjects more general, Miss Wraysbury accordingly began to question him concerning his travels. Since leaving Oxford, he had been at Lucca with his parents, returning by way of Switzerland and the Tyrol.—"Had he visited Innspruck?" she inquired. "Had he attempted to ascend Mont Blanc?"

"Oh! spare me my tour, my dear coz, if you have any pity on a deserving young man," was

resent her interference, you rebuke *me*, uncle, for not having been guilty of the same wretched sort of tale-bearing!"—said Edgar, shrugging his shoulders.

"Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux will be readily reconciled to their disappointment, when they become acquainted with Aunt Bessy," pleaded Netta, in a deprecating tone. "She is so thoroughly excellent,—so humane,—so humble."

"*They* would tell you that such qualities are tter for the parish-union than for the Countess of Dinton," replied Edgar.

"They constitute a perfect woman, however," persisted Miss Wraysbury, "whether attired in ermine and brocade, or serge and calico."

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"Oh! spare me my tour, my dear coz, if you have any pity on a deserving young man," was

his saucy reply. "I have been working away upon it desperately, for the last three days, to my aunts Mary and Jemima; till I have worn every glacier ice-bare, and perjured my precious soul by inventing miraculous escapes.— The Castle is, as you may suppose, Sir John, just now in but a moderate state of spirits," he continued—turning towards his uncle; "and I therefore, make it my duty to play Mr. Monkeyman for their amusement, to the utmost of my poor ability."

Sir John, though he contented himself with a slight bow of assent, was evidently of opinion that for the purpose in question, no amount of capacity was wanting.

"In his own family my poor grandfather was sincerely beloved," added Edgar. "He went through life without giving pain or trouble to any human being. When the coffin lid closes upon us, this is perhaps our best chance of being affectionately remembered."

Sir John, a little conscience-bitten, muttered

a few words to the effect that the late Lord Dinton had always passed for a very amiable man.

"It is the fashion now-a-days, in these over-wise times," rejoined his nephew, "to cry down as yea-nay and useless, men who are merely amiable. But, by Jove, I wish there were more of them!—People may prose away concerning large views—profound intelligence,—and the active development of the public mind;—but I can't help thinking that if every man rendered his own home, household, and dependants as happy, healthful, and hopeful, as lies in his power, the public mind would educate itself.—People who pretend to a more extensive horison, who boast of the conversion of half-a-dozen New Zealanders, or the colonisation of the river Bonny, are for the most part men who speculate with the souls and bodies of their fellow-creatures, instead of with guineas or canal-shares. As to political opinions and public measures, one sees them set up and

pulled down again, till it becomes plain that those who lived only to promulgate and establish them, sadly wasted their lives."

"You appear to have formed strong opinions, Edgar, at so early an age," said Sir John Wraysbury, out of patience.

"*Formed* them? Dear uncle, acquit me of taking half so much trouble!—I do but

> Pick them up, as pigeons peas,
> To utter afterwards as God doth please.

As Pope observes in one of his letters, few of the desultory thoughts that pass through one's own mind, deserve the name of opinions."

Sir John, who for many years past had looked upon literature as an impertinent interruption to the business of life, or as a farmer contemplates the poppies that impoverish his corn-field, surveyed the young prateapace with still increasing disgust.

"In fact," resumed Edgar, indifferent to the elevation of his uncle's eye-brows or depression of the corners of his mouth, "the only way I

ever manage to form what is called an opinion, is by rattling away as I am doing now, in my visits to Denny Cross; till Farmer is moved to call me an ass, and bid me hold my tongue. —On which, with pious faith in his superior wisdom, I instinctively adopt a creed contrary to my former professions, and fancy it my opinion."

To create a conductor for the storm gathering only too manifestly on the brow of her father, Janetta began hastily to cross-question her cousin concerning his intimacy with the Farmers and her little sister.

"They spend every Christmas, you know, at Denny Cross," was his ready reply; "and it is one of the most valued privileges of my winter vacation, to be admitted to the society of the Nestor of the bar; a light to lighten the Gentiles, had he not chosen to place himself in eclipse."

"And Aunt Sophy?"—

"My model of feminine perfection!"—

"Aunt Sophy is to Aunt Bessy what the garden-rose is to the hedge-rose; the same sweet flower, in a higher state of cultivation. In both, one worships a concentration of charity, purity, and every Christian virtue."

Janetta's eyes sparkled with delight.—That dear Aunt Sophy, — her childhood's earliest friend!—

"As to little Nonny," resumed Edgar, "I do not trust myself to talk of her; because, with my uncle's consent," (bowing profoundly to Sir John,) "she is some day to become my wife.—Nonny thinks very highly of me. I am her Queen Anne's farthing; the only person whom she ever saw put Uncle Farmer into a passion."

At this reckless confession, it was difficult to refrain from a smile.

"So I have offered to my little cousin my heart and hand," he continued; "and if Uncle Farmer won't make it worth our while to deliver him from the evil of maintaining us, we are to hire a crossing, or break stones

on the road; and live very happy ever afterwards."

He spoke with such glib and fluent assurance, that a stranger might have supposed he was simply narrating matter of fact. But Netta was beginning to see through the humour of Edgar Molyneux.—Condemned to the chartered formality of a dull great house, he had endeavoured to relieve its tedium by the assumption of extravagance and exaggeration, till these figures of speech had become almost habitual. But it happened to be the tone on earth most objectionable to the practical Sir John.

"I hope, Sir," observed the chatterbox, suddenly addressing his uncle in a more respectful tone, "that, as Mr. Farmer has decided to spend this Christmas at Torquay, and there will be no one hereabouts to call me, *à tout propos*, ass, blockhead, and jackanapes, or words to that effect, you will allow me to come to Harrals; now and then, to be snubbed, in order to keep up the charter?—At the Castle, I am a little spoiled.

As the only living thing there under forty years of age, they treat me as still a baby, and load me with sugar-plums, and gilt story books. My dear, good old grandmother, I verily believe, thinks me fitter for a rocking-horse than a hunter!"

"Most children, born within the present century," bitterly retorted Sir John, "fancy themselves fit for hunters before they can run alone."

"Alas! poor children!" rejoined his nephew. "With such a limited choice of baubles to amuse our manhood, we ought to economise them in the outset,—or what is to tickle the fancy of our middle age?—You, for instance, uncle. When in a nankin frock, you used to build little towers, in little bricks of deal, in the nursery of the old Harrals which preceded this new Harrals, (and which, unlike the Phœnix, has been followed by so much finer a bird than its predecessor,) had you attempted mortar instead of bricks, and granite as well as mortar, why, you would by this time have worn down your bump of con-

structiveness, and become *blasé* with the trowel. —And, under such circumstances, how would you have occupied your time for these dozen years past?"

To have his pursuits thus mapped out before him by a hobbledehoy. was somewhat insulting to the millionary; more especially since, if Edgar's account of his mode of picking up opinions were to be trusted, he was only rehearsing one of the sapient verdicts of Roger Farmer Q.C.—With an involuntary glance round the finely-proportioned and splendidly furnished room in which they were sitting, small as it was, in proportion to his worldly belongings, he felt too much inflated by the pomp of wealth to submit to be talked down by a landless boy.—Balaam the prophet can scarcely have waxed more indignant at the rebuke of his long-eared monitor.

"I have always heard," said he, with seeming *nonchalance*, "that, with an adequate fortune, this great kingdom was able to afford to any

reasonable man, both occupation and pastime."

"A popular fallacy!" rejoined Edgar. "And you forget, my dear uncle, that this great kingdom, as you call it, is not the great kingdom of your youth.—By the aid of steam, the Gods have annihilated both time and space; so that Nat Lee's bombast has become converted into common sense. But they have annihilated, by the same agency, half the pleasures of our forefathers. Fox-hunting, pheasant-shooting, travelling post, are ruined by railroads; and the Anglo-Saxons are humiliated into recognition of the littleness of their 'great kingdom,' by being able to breakfast at Brighton and dine at Edinburgh.—Several projected railways, I have been assured, were abandoned, because, owing to insular limitation, there was much danger of the express trains precipitating themselves, like the Gadarene swine, into the sea."

Sir John was about to attempt a rounded period or two, about moral grandeur and con-

comitant colonial extension. But he stopped short. Perhaps he considered his presumptuous nephew unworthy of his eloquence.—Perhaps because he was already bottling it up for his maiden speech.

"I have even heard speculative people assert," added young Molyneux, assuming a graver face, "that it would have been far more advantageous for the descendants of George III., had that obstinate monarch, instead of goading America into rebellion, embraced its interests, cut the English concern, embarked his court and family in an ark built at Blackwall; and established the seat of government on that mighty continent, whose mines were yet unexhausted and whose fields still fertile; — leaving peevish thievish little Britain to subside into a colony.— Who knows?—His Majesty might have created, perhaps, penal establishments in Lincolnshire, and transported his transatlantic felons to Ireland or Wales. Think of the monster nation, into which by this time, we should have, progressed."

Luckily for Edgar Molyneux,—if as desirous as he expressed himself to retain a friendly footing at Harrals,—luncheon was at that moment announced:—that pleasant meal, without which the day of the English country-house would, like the needless Alexandrine or the wounded snake, "drag its slow length along;" tedious as the speeches of more than one M.P., or the visitation sermons of D.D.s without limitation.

## CHAPTER VII.

SIR JOHN WRAYSBURY had already made such progress in paternal strategy, as to understand the fatal charm of prohibition.—Instead, therefore, of denouncing his nephew as an intolerable puppy, and expressing to Netta an intention of excluding him from his house, he spoke of him, when they were chatting together the following day, as "a rattling young fellow, who would probably grow more steady in time."

"In time to marry dear little Nonny, perhaps?" replied Netta, busily plying her crochet needle. "Eight years' experience of the world should be able to mature even him."

Sir John was not a little edified to find his daughter thus inferentially settle eighteen,—her own present age,—as the exact moment for marrying.—He contented himself, however, with inquiring what was the subject of her argument with her cousin,—apparently a very discordant one,—during their stroll in the garden.

"Discordant indeed, papa;—almost a quarrel!—Edgar chose to maintain that my cousin Olave is not, has never been, and never will be a gentleman. Mr. Harpsden, it seems, after bringing up his son as a gown-boy at Eton and sizar at college, has made an usher of him at some grammar-school, with a view to becoming head-master hereafter."

"A very suitable education and prospect for the son of Mr. Harpsden," said her father, drily.

"Then why do people say, papa, (which Edgar admits to be the case,) that he has done all this only to annoy and mortify our family?"

"Who told you that they said so?"—

"Lord Dinton, during your illness at Nor-

thampton; as a reason why neither Olave nor his father were among the inquirers."

"The less you talk, or hear, or think about these Harpsdens, the better," rejoined Sir John, angrily. "The father insulted me grossly, many years ago; and as my poor sister died shortly afterwards, I have never felt called upon to overlook the offence."

"He has married a second wife, too?"

"Within a year of becoming a widower!—Poor Carry was a confirmed invalid, and ill-calculated for a clergyman's wife. But her memory deserved to be more respected by her husband; who chose for her successor a farmer's daughter of the village, by whom he has something like a dozen children. He consequently cannot afford to do justice to his eldest son."

"He is poor, then?"

"Harpsden had nothing of his own,—Carry about four hundred a year.—The living of Harrals amounts to eight."

"But with twelve hundred a year, surely it seems unfair to make an usher of poor Olave."

"Many of our Bishops, my dear Netta, have risen to the mitre from such an origin."

"By *very* superior merit, perhaps. — But how many more remain schoolmasters all their lives!"

"And are content to do so. The salary of several of our endowed schools forms a noble provision for persons of the Harpsden class."

"But not for the grandson of Sir Harry Woolston of Harrals, if it entitle his own cousin to say that he is not, and never will be, a gentleman."

"Mr. Edgar Molyneux, (the authority, I fancy, you are quoting,) is capable of saying the same thing of Albert Grandison, or any other young man of his acquaintance who does not happen to have been at Christchurch, or to employ the same tailor as himself."

"You are wrong there, dear papa.—No one can dress more plainly than Edgar!"

"Because plainness of dress is the foppery in vogue.—But to return, my dear Netta, and for the last time, I trust, to the Harpsdens. It is right I should explain to you that there exists positive enmity betwen myself and the rector of Harrals.—When he came to this place, as curate, he was much noticed by my father and mother, as a respectable young man of humble extraction, whose activity in the village and deference towards themselves excused a certain forwardness of manner, the ill-breeding of a low-born man. One of my sisters, whose feeble health rendered her more considerate towards the sufferings of the poor than the rest of the family, and who was thus brought into frequent collision with the plausible curate, saw fit to fall in love with, and marry, him. Her parents, afraid of violently opposing the wishes of one so delicate, contented themselves with expostulating, but in vain.—

Poor Carry became Mrs. Harpsden; her husband fancying, that, having thus effected an entrance into the Woolston family, he should profit by Sir Harry's infirmities of mind and body, to acquire unlimited authority in the house."

"Was this previous to your own marriage, papa?"—

"By a year or two; and Harpsden's influence not only retarded the event, but perpetuated the misunderstanding between myself and my family. The fellow was clearly actuated by interested motives; which, being accidentally frustrated, he had the audacity to expect that, at my father's death, I should reward him for his malice and treachery, by alienating in his favour my rightful substance and the inheritance of my children."

"Was it grandpapa or yourself who presented him with the living of Harrals?"

"My father;—in the conviction that, besides being his son-in-law, he was an excellent parish-

priest. But the rector has proved a far other man than the curate. His second marriage placed him at once on a different footing among his parishioners :—the present Mrs. Harpsden being sister to one of the least reputable of my tenants : —and the connection involves her husband in all the squabbles, intrigues, and mischiefs of the place."

"But why should there be squabbles, intrigues, and mischiefs in a country-village, like Harrals ?"

"When you have seen more of the world, Netta, you will know that, from such petty commotions, no place is exempt. I will not, however, deny that this parish has suffered greatly from the absenteeism of our family,—perhaps I should add, and the consequent predominance of Harpsden. When he accepted the living, he was an orthodox country clergyman, holding, like most of his brethren, that the rubric of our Liturgy enjoins forms wisely suffered to fall into desuetude ; because, though the infancy of

the Reformed Church could not be suddenly weaned from its wonted food, the lapse of centuries had opened the eyes of the Christian world to their papistical origin. But no sooner did he find his expectation of a legacy from my father disappointed, than he endeavoured to recommend himself, by sudden conversion, to some old Puseyite ladies of large fortune, who reside at the extremity of the parish, at Fornly Lodge; and on visiting our venerable parish church two years ago, I found, to my amazement, its ancient oaken ceiling illuminated with gaudy colours, like a fashionable conservatory; —an altar tricked out like a stage decoration;— and even the Books of Common Prayer in my family pew (in which we are required to pray for his most gracious Majesty King William), re-bound into as close a mimicry of missals, as Mr. Harpsden's moppings and mowings of the genuflexions of a Catholic priest. I confess I was indignant.—I confess that I expressed myself in no measured terms to the new clerk,—a

sacristan to look at,—a drone to listen to. Having supplied four hundred pounds, as patron of the living, towards the restoration of the church, I ought to have been consulted before this mummery was attempted.—Yes!—I ought decidedly to have been consulted!"

"Do not agitate yourself, dear papa. I was wrong to tempt you to talk of all this just now," said Miss Wraysbury, alarmed by his quickened respiration, and the veins swelling on his forehead.

"I am not agitated, Netta; I am simply narrating facts.—Because he had induced those poor deluded old women at Fornly to present to the church a gorgeous painted window, resplendent with saints and martyrs, he felt privileged to introduce all this clerical coxcombry,—all this parsonic dilettante-ism—into the simple church service;—creating a sort of sabbath-opera, to bewilder the senses of the farmers' wives and daughters!"

"It is for this reason, then, that we attend

divine worship at Hurdiston, instead of in our parish church?" said Netta,—who had hitherto fancied that her father was unwilling to perform his devotions in a pew situated over the grave of her mother.

"Precisely. I choose to worship God in my age as I worshipped Him in my youth, and as he was worshipped by my parents before me,—in all simplicity and truth.—It is the reason, too, why, when the wind is westerly, the bells of Harrals are perpetually dinning in our ears.—We shall come to incense and the confessional, in time, unless I interpose to prevent it. Last year, I memorialised the bishop. But his lordship's remonstrances served to make a martyr of the rector and a monster of myself, in the eyes of half his congregation."

"But if Mr. Harpsden should be acting only according to the dictates of his conscience?"—pleaded Miss Wraysbury.

"He has never, at any period of life, behaved like a man acting upon principle. Expediency

is his God; and if England were conquered by the Turks, we should soon see William Harpsden a grand mollah."

"I perfectly understand your resentment against Mr. Harpsden, papa,"—said Janetta, not a little shocked by the violence of her father's language. "But surely, something might be done for my poor unfortunate cousin?"

"Let me hear no more about him just now!" exclaimed Sir John, rising impatiently, as if to close the conversation. "I have no doubt Edgar Molyneux is for once right, in declaring Olave Harpsden to be anything but a gentleman.—Young men soon find each other out."

Janetta could scarcely resist a smile at the inconsistency of the angry man. But her father had by this time taken up a newly-arrived Quarterly Review. — Better leave him to subside over its pages into a milder state of mind.

Under cover of his book, however, Sir John, like many ostensible readers, was ruminating less over the paradoxes of Tory statistics, than

over an act for the better legislation of his daughter's opinions; when lo! the door opened, and without prelude or announcement, in glided his nephew Edgar: booted, spurred, and spattered, in the brightest of pink and whitest of cords; full of spirits, aided by *quantum* more than *suff* of sherry, from his hunting-flask; fresh, in short, from the fastest run of the season. Under such circumstances, what nephew ever stood in awe of even the stateliest of uncles!

"How are you, sir?—Netta, how are you? I would not let the servants announce me," was his cool salutation to the father and daughter. "I am come as an envoy extraordinary," he added, on receiving from Sir John a curt and cool welcome. "My well-known genius having decided, from the state of the wind this morning, which way the fox was to run, I offered myself as Pacolet to my grandmother; who mentioned, last night, that she had a note to despatch to Miss Wraysbury.—And here I am, and here it is,"—continued he, dropping on one

knee to present the missive to Janetta; by whom it was speedily read and communicated to her father, as he sat dumb-struck by his nephew's assurance.

"Lady Dinton is good enough to apologise," she said, "that her deep family affliction prevents her daughters and herself from coming to Harrals—'to welcome'—she writes, 'the daughter of their dear Lady Wraysbury.'"

"Very kind,—very gracious,—but scarcely necessary," was her father's stiff reply.

"But Lady Dinton adds, papa, that, connected as we are about to be by a second marriage between the families, there can be no obstacle to receiving us at Molyneux Castle, as soon as the state of your health will allow you to leave home for a day or two."

"Very kind, — very gracious." — And he longed again to add—"but very unnecessary."

"If the dulness of a family circle do not appal you, my dear uncle," added Edgar, "you would confer a real favour on my grand-

mother and aunts, by bringing Netta to the Castle."

"At a fitting time," primly replied Sir John, "the acquaintance will arise as a matter of course."

"I *do* believe that the clay of which Midland county people are composed, is ten degrees colder than that of any other district!" cried Edgar, earnestly. "Even to be happy, we are content to wait for a fitting time! My uncle Dinton, for instance.—After a patience unheard of since the days of Jacob and Rachel, he is literally waiting for the month of February, to become the happiest of men, that decorum may not be violated in the colour of a coat!—And now, poor little Netta will perhaps have to spend the winter in no better company than the stone griffins on the terrace; because she must wait for 'a fitting time' to make acquaintance with two old maiden ladies and a dowager,—the worthiest women that ever breathed,—who are dying to know and love her."

No dispassionate spectator would have denied that Edgar, planted in his hunting costume upon the hearth-rug, with his back turned to a fire that rivalled its brilliant colouring,—his cheeks glowing with exercise, and his eyes sparkling with animation,—afforded as handsome a specimen of the Great British sportsman, as ever found his way across country with the Pytchley, or conned his "Nimrod."—Or that Sir John Wraysbury, filling his green velvet lounging chair as amply as a Colchester oyster its shell, and in nature nearly as cold and as impassive, presented an admirable study for Doyle, as a personification of the Great British County Member, taking his ease.

But whatever he might look, he was, alas! far from easy.—And though he brought his nephew to a sudden check in his best pace of social philosophy, by carelessly inquiring whether they had "had a good run that morning, and whether they had killed their fox?" he looked, as he felt, as though he would willingly have committed him for twelve months' hard labour.

The young sportsman was fain to confess that, his crack hunter had been blown early in a "tremendous run, caused by a burning scent," and that his second horse had enabled him to reach Harrals.—"But all this must appear mere bosh, to *you*, Netta?" added he, by way of drawing his cousin into the conversation.—"Your Dorsetshire experience of scarlet coats, is probably limited to its Local Militia Captains?"

"I wish Mr. Grandison could hear you," was her laughing reply.

"The Guardsman?—Surely he does not condescend to appear in uniform, out of reach of the Horse Guards?"

"I was speaking of his brother."

"Of Berty?—Do you know Berty? But of course you do. The best fellow in the world! Such excellent fun as we had together last summer on the Rhine!"

"Mr. Albert Grandison is now, I believe, an *attaché* at Vienna," observed Sir John, whose

very questions were made in a tone of dictation.

"Is he?—If his ambassador knows as much, His Excellency must have a tenacious memory: for Berty takes care not to be visible above the horizon more than once in six months."

"Rash conduct,—in one who has his fortune to make by diplomacy!"

"If made, it would not last him long, I'm afraid," said Edgar, laughing. "A gold mill, turned by the Pactolus, would not suffice for Berty. I scarcely know, indeed, what *would* keep his head above water; unless *you*, Netta, would take compassion upon him, and marry him.—And by the way, he is a great admirer of yours; I remember now, his telling me that, when he went down to Blandhurst last winter, in the character of a prodigal son, to eat husks and get his debts paid, he was constantly wandering about the Lynchcombe downs, with his gun on his shoulder, on pretence of shooting sea-fowl: but in reality——'

"Are you not afraid, Mr. Molyneux," interrupted Sir John, suddenly rising and pointing to the windows, darkened, like his own countenance, by a gathering storm,—"of being overtaken by rain before you can get home?—The glass has fallen considerably since morning."

"And Walkingham informed me just now, like an almanack, that we were to expect much rain about this time," added Janetta, anxiously.

"I'm afraid, then, I must lose no time in asking for your answer to my grandmother's letter?" said Edgar, snatching up his hunting-cap, and preparing for immediate departure, lest he should be still more explicitly dismissed by his uncle.

"My daughter will write to Lady Dinton. I will take care to send over her reply to the Castle," said the county member, having already rung for "Mr. Molyneux's horse," and evincing no intention of resuming his seat, till after Mr. Molyneux's departure; which was at last so precipitately made, that he managed to

clear the court-yard before a tremendous burst of rain came down, to render disagreeably apparent to the eyes of the whole household, the monstrous inhospitality of Sir John.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE road winding through the park towards the village of Harrals, so as to amplify half a mile's distance into three times the length, afforded time to poor Edgar to get wet to the skin, before he reached the steep descent into its narrow plashy highway; midway in which, it became necessary to moderate his slapping pace. A brood of unhappy-looking village children were paddling their way, like very dirty little ducks, out of the school-house: where, after the rational lessons of the day were done, they had been undergoing vocal tuition, with the aid of a

pitch-pipe; at the hands of a broken-down organist, too old and too deaf for any thing, except to teach little children to psalmodise, out of time and tune.

Having shouted to them, almost furiously, to stand aside,—for Edgar was sadly out of sorts just then with the world and its miry ways,—his ill-humour was aggravated by the sauciness of one of the callow choristers, who pointed to his horse's foot, in token that the animal had cast a shoe; a species of chaff so familiar to the Queen's highway, that Edgar's first impulse was to lay his hunting-whip across the boy's shoulders, and extract other notes from him than those of the singing-loft.

Another moment afforded disagreeable proof that the warning was honestly given. But the glow of a blacksmith's shop, shining through the rain like a gold fish through its globe of turbid water, made him congratulate himself that the mischief had occurred before he lost sight of the village.

Speedily dismounting, he gave his hasty instructions to the Mulciber, who, but that he plied his bellows in a hunting county, might have been more astonished at the sight of so fine a gentleman and so fine a bit of blood.

Half-an-hour,—for a suitable shoe had to be forged, (the cart-horse custom of the operator supplying none fit for the purpose,)—was the shortest delay promised.—And still, the rain came pelting, pouring down; as it does on a June afternoon in London, when reviews, flower-shows, or *déjeuners* are in prospect.—Between the foul air of the sooty smithy, and the currents of water in the muddy road, Edgar had a sorry choice.

"Can you tell me, sir, of any inn or public-house in the village, where I could dry my clothes while my horse is being shod?" he inquired, seizing by the arm a man who was hurrying past the pent-house under which he was sheltered,—of whom nothing was visible but a reeking cotton umbrella and a pair of dirty gaiters.

Compelled to draw up, though in the midst of a puddle, the individual addressed, on removing the umbrella from his face, and perceiving the prepossessing exterior of his interlocutor, answered that "the only house of entertainment, the Woolston Arms, stood at the farther extremity of the village.

"But my house is close at hand, sir," added he. "Pray come and warm yourself by the fire."

Grateful acquiescence was inevitable; though Edgar, convinced that he had rashly grappled himself to the village doctor, or lawyer, surmised that the Woolston Arms, though their good entertainment for man and horse was probably mythical, would have been far more to his taste. But when, with sheets of rain still dashing in his face, he found himself, a minute or two afterwards, following his leader through a rusty gateway, the demi-pillars of which were surmounted by mossy stone balls—a horrible surmise entered his mind, that the unpleasant-looking

brick mansion confronting him, covered by a forlorn vine, from which the yellow leaves were being washed down by the storm into the slimy path under their feet, could be none other than the Rectory!

During the long absence of the Woolston family from Harrals, he had never visited the village; which lay out of the road from Denny Cross to Dinton, "his daily haunt and ancient neighbourhood." Neither the parson nor the parsonage, therefore, was known to him by sight. But it was no time to pause. The rain was dashing down like a shower-bath; and his gaitered guide, who had hurried on before, stood graciously holding open the house-door.

"Oh! my prophetic soul!—my uncle!"

was his muttered exclamation, as he found himself in a parlour, strongly scented with the vapour of a cindery fire, of birch-broom tea, and children in sloppy pinafores. On a table, still covered with a crumbmy tea-cloth, two cherubs were pursuing their studies;—one, over a

broken slate,—another, over a dog's-eared spelling-book; while in the window-seat, knelt two younger ones, with their noses flattened against the glass, whimpering at the state of the weather.

All four ceased from their murmurs, and crouched down, like threatened whelps in their kennel, on their father's entrance. The room was small and shabby as the parlour at Denny Cross,—"alike, but oh! how different."—Instead of the tidy homeliness of Bessy's sanctum, all was obsolete finery:—glaring paper, covered with coloured prints in tawdy frames; screens and card racks, bedizened with faded ribbons:—evidently the choice of Mrs. Harpsden number two, the notable successor of "poor Carry."

The proprietor of all this nastiness apologized, however, so civilly to his guest for the disorder of the place,—the natural result, he said, of a rainy afternoon, in a house full of children,—that Edgar felt ashamed of his own reluctance to announce himself; particularly when the

Rector put his innocents to flight, and bad them desire their mother would send in coals and dry clothes for the re-edification of the stranger.

He alluded to their "mother," in issuing his orders, precisely as others would have done to the housemaid; and before Edgar had time to make the announcement incumbent on him, in bustled a slatternly-looking middle-aged woman, full of good-humoured exclamations of pity for his plight; and as ready to rub him down as any groom in the Castle stables would have been to rub down his horse. She insisted on his taking off his steaming hunting-coat, and hanging it on a chair before the fire, as familiarly as if they had been friends for years.

She dealt with him, in short, in patriarchal style, as with the stranger within her gates; for there was a great deal of good Samaritanism in the pulpy-looking mother of the unsatisfactory faggot of olive-branches;—twelve of them,—alas! —twelve facsimiles of each other,—distinguished

only by the half-head of growth denoting a year's interval.

While the fussy matron was proposing in succession a glass of ginger-wine, a cup of tea, and an ale-posset,—"to secure the gentleman from taking cold," Edgar blurted out, awkwardly, his self-introduction.

"You do not remember me, Mrs. Harpsden," said he. "My father and mother reside so constantly abroad, that many years have elapsed since we met. My name is Molyneux."

"Edgar?—My nephew Edgar?"

But to *that* epithet young Molyneux could not find it in his heart to respond "Amen."—

Aware how complete had been the estrangement between his parents and the Rectory from the time of Mr. Harpsden's precipitate second marriage, he had half expected, in naming himself, to be bowed out again into the rain. But on the contrary, the brows which at sight of the littered parlour had seemed to undergo spasmodic contraction, now expanded again. — And

while the soft-hearted and soft-handed partner of his fire-side indulged in—"Well, to be sure!" —and "well, to think of it!"—with explosive iteration, he shook his nephew-in-law so heartily by the hand, and welcomed him so kindly to his house, that the moist young fox-hunter felt almost dried by his warmth, and thoroughly conscience-stricken.

Mrs. Harpsden, on finding him to be a relation, insisted on his divesting himself of his waistcoat as well as his coat, and proposed exchanging the ale posset previously offered, for white wine whey.—But Edgar, with cordial thanks, assured her that the best thing he could do was to mount his horse the moment it was ready, and ride home as fast as it would carry him, to the Castle, for a complete change of clothes.—On which, Harpsden, snatching up his umbrella, was off again, through the rain, to the smithy, to accelerate the bellows over which he held canonical sway;—perhaps, because he felt this accidental interview with one of the sons of

Belial to be somewhat embarrassing; perhaps because afraid of having to persuade his nephew to "stay dinner."—For dinner was a domestic incident to which he was himself looking back, as his penultimate meal; and though he had adopted the homely hours of his thrifty second wife, he remembered the later hours of days more pompous.

Edgar rejoiced at his departure.—With Mrs. Harpsden, he felt much more at ease. With Mrs. Harpsden, he felt already almost cordial. Such genuine good-nature beamed from her unmeaning blue eyes!—She was so evidently sincere in her regrets that his cousin Olave had not been at home to welcome him!—That distance or unkindness could exist between near kindred, was a thing foreign to her comprehension; and she would have been almost as ready to kneel down and draw off the boots and chafe the freezing feet of the stranger, as, in her tent the most hospitable of the daughters of Abraham.

On finding herself alone with him, she could

not forbear talking of her stepson;—his virtues, his talents, and the pity it was that he and his father did not what she termed "hit it off together." — She did not think Mr. Harpsden rendered *quite* justice to the merits of Olave.

"You see, Mr. Molyneux, Mr. H. is apt to visit on *him* the faults of his kinsfolk. It is no fault of Olave's that Sir John Woolston (no offence, I hope?) is a curmudgeon; for the young man himself is as open-handed as he is open-hearted. Such a brother as he has been to my children, — teaching them, sir, like a school-master, and loving and playing with them like one of their playmates. When I came into this house, Mr. Molyneux, (and a proud day it was for me, sir,) Olave was but a child; and I petted him as such, and soon loved him so dearly, that when little ones of my own made their appearance, I scarce felt a difference betwixt 'em."

Edgar saw, by this time, that the woman,

who went prattling on thus artlessly, was a being without guile or bitterness; one of those exceptional natures that fling off the corruptions of life as the feathers of the swan the rain. Whatever the meanness of the Rector, it had not communicated itself to his wife.—It was easy, therefore, to forgive her blowsy curls and ill-adjusted hooks-and-eyes, and to overlook the dirty table-cloth and littered hearth.—Nay, he almost forgave the want of pocket-handkerchiefs and pocket-combs exhibited by the innocents.

Her husband, meanwhile, probably conjectured the drift of her conversation with the son of his sister-in-law. For in a far shorter time than could have been anticipated, he was seen hurrying past the parlour window, marshalling the well-shod "second horse." And as the rain, like all sudden showers, had ceased as abruptly as it began, and the sky was now clear, Edgar hastened to take leave of his kind and over-communicative hostess, settle with the black-

smith's boy, shake hands with "uncle Harpsden," and gallop off towards home.

But it was with his ears down-hanging, and his reflections down-hearted. He felt painfully convicted of gross injustice towards Olave. As to the Harpsdens themselves, how differently had been their treatment of him,—*him*, their enemy, from that of the churlish, grudging, inhospitable Crœsus of Harrals!

Of Aunt Carry's successor, though he thought with the utmost indulgence, he did her scant justice even now. Had he known how often, at the risk of drawing down upon herself the thunder-bolts of Jupiter Harpsden, she had succoured and comforted the miserable lot of her stepson, he would, at parting, have kissed her hand.—So far from treating with disrespect the memory of her predecessor, as Sir John had described,— her deference was carried to excess. In a drawer of her wardrobe, was carefully set aside as sacred to the deceased, and belonging to her son, secure from air and day-

light, a collection of the trinkets, laces, and treasures of poor Carry, which she preserved in all the odour of sanctity and lavender, for the future bride of Olave.

In these sentiments, however, she had never been encouraged by her husband. Harpsden, at heart as mercenary as the rich baronet, had married Farmer Bothamley's full-blown sister with the intention of making her not only a nurse for his motherless boy, but an active substitute for the sickly dawdle whose fortune had proved so inferior to his expectations.—Long accustomed to admire the hospitable cheer and well-kept household over which Sarah Bothamley presided, he expected the Rectory to assume the same sunny aspect.

But he had not calculated that a quick succession of offspring would invalidate her industry, and mar the order of his house:—still less, that the habits suitable to Ash Bank were ill-assorted to his professional dignity.—Theatrical managers, in the days when theatres

had companies, were careful to engage the stars of the provinces to fill fourth or fifth rate parts on the London boards; and even the great Edmund Kean, though the Shylock of Exeter, was to be a supernumerary at Drury Lane.—But on discovering that he had over-rated the genius of Farmer Bothamley's sister, and placed her in a class above her degree, Harpsden remorselessly degraded her into a household slave. Fortunately, her excellent disposition was her safeguard. If she perceived, she certainly did not resent his unkindness.

Though little of all this was at present apparent to Edgar, he did not hesitate, while spurring his horse homewards lest he should be too late for the dowager's dinner-hour, to place Mrs. Harpsden, *née* Bothamley, in spite of her untidy gown and hair, in the category of ornaments to her sex.

He judged it unnecessary, however, to enlarge at the Castle on the merits or demerits of the Harpsdens; being unwilling to draw attention to the frequency of his visits to Harrals.—On the

present occasion, moreover, his morning's occupations naturally escaped discussion.—The late post generally brought his foreign letters; and among them, was one from his mother, containing family news of more than ordinary interest.

After a detailed programme of their prospects for the winter,—English families of note arriving and arrived,—and diplomatic changes of far more moment to the dinners and balls of the Eternal City than to the political interests of Europe,—Mrs. Molyneux added,—*à propos* to her severe mourning for the late earl, " which would be a sad tax on the pretty *toilettes* of poor Theo.,"—" It is lucky, by the way, that, under cover of this *corvée*, my black gown in honour of poor Clara's husband, will pass unobserved. I am afraid Wroughton was a dreadful person.—He died suddenly, at Frankfort, last month, under circumstances so suspicious, and leaving his affairs in such disorder, that his papers and effects were sealed up by the police.—Saint

Marcel, the French *chargé-d'affaires* wrote word of all this, confidentially, to Gerald; and I dispatched, of course, a few lines of condolence to poor Clara: though, had I dared, I should have made them congratulations.—Her answer, which has just reached me, contains no allusion to the circumstances attending her husband's death; but she says that Hilda and herself are left miserably off;—with something about four hundred a year,—the interest of her fortune, secured to her by settlement. On this, however, she says, they can live decently in Germany; and, Frankfort being out of the question, (she refers, of course, to Wroughton's misdoings and discredit,) they are about to make some small town in Wurtemburg their future home."

"But Sir John Wraysbury will now make a proper allowance to his sister," argued Lady Jemima, when, in the course of the evening, her nephew disclosed the contents of his letter.—"He *must*.—For his own credit sake he *must!*"

"I have heard Emma mention that Mr. Wroughton was especially obnoxious to him,"—observed Lady Mary.

"But what then?—Mr. Wroughton is dead; and his widow an object of the utmost compassion—Do you remember your Aunt Clara, Edgar?"—

"Perfectly.—I recollect her at my grandfather's funeral, with the saddest face I ever beheld: a model for a Mater Dolorosa."

"And *I* also, remember her a model for a Hebe!" added Lord Dinton. "She accompanied my brother and his wife to the continent, a gay young girl; made Wroughton's acquaintance, under their auspices,—married him, and never smiled again."

"Some years ago," added Edgar, "we met the Wroughtons at the baths of Aix, in Savoy. But they seemed annoyed at our arrival, and soon disappeared. Their daughter was even then, beautiful."—

"The Hilda of whom Emma speaks as

about to share her mother's scanty pittance," remarked Lady Jemima. "Poor child!—What a prospect for them both!"—

Edgar made no reply; he was, perhaps, deliberating whether Sir John had been apprised of Mr. Wroughton's decease, and chose to take no notice of it? Or whether poor Mrs. Wroughton, so long and obstinately repulsed by her rich brother, had secured herself by silence, against further ungraciousness?

In the latter case, it might perhaps serve the cause of the widow and orphan if he placed their wealthy relative in possession of the facts of the case, by communicating the contents of his dispatch from Rome.

Edgar, Edgar!—Was this seeming magnanimity only a pretext for another visit to Harrals?

## CHAPTER IX.

HAD Mr. Molyneux foreseen the result of his communication, he might perhaps have shown himself less charitable, or less officious.

On arriving at Harrals, a little nervous as to the reception awaiting him on his speedy return, he found Sir John and his daughter taking quiet exercise on the terrace: the storm of the preceding day having swept the winter sky, and rendered it unclouded as spring-time. But even from a distance, he saw that his uncle's looks were far less auspicious than the weather; and, taking his letter from his pocket, ap-

proached them with it in his hand, as if holding a flag of truce.

To his great surprise, the contents produced a favourable change in the deportment of his uncle. — Compunctious visitings softened his heart. "Poor little Clara!" Reduced to an income such as his daughter's ex-governess found insufficient. "Poor little Clara!" Compassion brought her before his mind's eye as the fair young sister with whom he had played at dominoes; not as the widow of the *taré* Dick Wroughton. At the idea of the insults to which she might have been recently exposed, he felt so much disquieted, as to propose returning to the house.

"Of course, dear papa," said Netta, as she established him comfortably in his arm-chair, and brought a foot-stool for his feet, "of course, you will make poor dear Aunt Wroughton and her child comfortable for life?—How old is the little girl?"

Her father was ashamed to own that, though

of the two children of whom Clara had been the mother, one, he knew, was dead, he was quite uncertain whether the survivor were the elder or younger.—Taking the chance that the one she had lost might have been her first child, —he replied,—"Twelve or thirteen," I imagine.

His nephew was too intent on other matters, to set him right. Hoping to get rid of young Molyneux, and desirous to pursue his reminiscences unmolested, Sir John now requested his nephew to write immediately to his mother, and obtain Mrs. Wroughton's present address.

"She must have left Frankfort by this time, and I have a letter of consequence to transmit to her."

"I will not, however, wait for the return of the courier from Rome," he observed to Netta, half-an-hour afterwards, when Edgar, on charitable thoughts intent, had hurried away to execute the commission—"Though my sister has not thought proper to write to *me* on this occasion, I cannot too soon set her heart at ease

concerning her future prospects.—I will forward my letter through Rothschild's house.—They have always acted as her bankers."

Netta kissed her father's hand as she drew her writing-table towards him; as though the act of kindness he meditated were an obligation conferred on herself. She had no vulgar miss-ish curiosity to learn the amount and manner of the benefaction meditated by Sir John.

Could she have surmised its nature, she would have been less incurious. The offer came, not inscribed with either of the three mystic initials, accused of regulating the movements of Sir John. Neither L. S. nor D. appeared in his letter.—He simply requested his sister to make his house her home: bringing little Hilda to be the friend and companion of his daughter!—

For the first time, he discerned an advantage in the total want of family connection imputed to Wroughton; for had there been any risk of entailing a large following, even of the most

irreproachable kind, he would not have made the proposal.—But he knew that the deceased had not a relation in the world.—During their journey homewards from Germany, to attend their father's funeral, Clara had confided as much to her sister-in-law; and at that epoch, though overcome by grief and remorse, Sir John had found leisure to note the feminine charm imparted by the cares of life to the manners of his once too lively sister. He could not desire a gentler or more lady-like chaperon for the heiress of Lynchcombe.

That Mrs. Wroughton would decline his proposal, seemed as impossible as, till the great year of revolutions brought such an event into notoriety, for a couple of European crowns to go a-begging. Yet had he been present when his letter reached the miserable house in the suburb of Durlach, into which the widow had subsided, he would have learned another lesson. Throughout her twenty years of alarms and mortifications, Mrs. Wroughton had never forgotten

the emblazoned family tree suspended in the old hall at home;—never forgotten that she was a Woolston of Harrals;—and the pride that lay coiled at the bottom of her heart reared up its snaky crest, at the idea of becoming a poor dependent on the wealthy brother by whom she had been so scornfully cast off.

Her first impulse was to leave his letter unanswered, as he had left so many of her own. Her next, to reply to it by a recapitulation of her grievances against the only son of her parents. —But her third, after glancing at her dear and beautiful Hilda, was to recal to mind that, in case of her own death, her daughter would be friendless in the world.—And, even while enjoying the benefit of maternal protection, to what insults had she not been exposed!—

For the moment that Wroughton's stern arm, pitiless heart, and daring assurance had ceased to impose a restraint upon his dupes, yells of accusations had burst forth against his memory. He was called swindler and forger; and in

the general outcry, the names of his wife and daughter were most unjustly intermingled. They, more than all the rest, his victims, were scouted as his confederates! Of those who, while living, had courted his company, and who now vilified and denounced him, not one was sufficiently generous to stand forward as the friend or even advocate of two helpless women. While endeavouring to establish their own virtue by trampling on his grave, they cared little whose name was soiled, or whose feelings distressed.

The very clerk who, as the bearer of a dispatch to the sister of the wealthy Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, M.P., addressed her with the utmost deference, had been employed only a few weeks before to upbraid and to threaten.

The dread of a repetition of such scenes prevailed, therefore, over Mrs. Wroughton's reluctance. *She* was inured to wrong and to oppression. But Hilda was a gentle creature whose young life must not be withered up

by the blasts of adversity as pitilessly as her own.

She accepted, therefore, but without too eager a display of gratitude, the offers of her brother, including a credit of five hundred pounds at Rothschild's, to enable her to make her appearance, suitably apparelled and attended, under the roof of the millionary.—Little as Sir John had cared for her needs so long as she was exiled to the banks of the Maine, no indication of poor circumstances must disgrace the family from the moment she was admitted to share its bread and salt.

The completion of Hilda's education, the advancement of Hilda's interests, the establishment of Hilda's happiness, was now, poor Mrs. Wroughton fancied, assured. One of the finest of those safe and peaceful country houses of plenteous England, of which she had so often talked to her child,—that splendid London mansion of the Wraysburys, of which so many English loungers at Homburg and Baden had

tantalized her by a description—were henceforward to be their home.—Having once accepted her new position, she soon learned to contemplate it with thankfulness.—As a prevailing breeze carries all influences before it, every thing tended to reconcile her to the change.

At Harrals, meanwhile, the prospect of her arrival created eager expectation. — The one thing which Janetta had considered wanting to her happiness, was now in view,—the counsel and affection of her own sex.—Aunt Bessy was busy with her approaching change of condition; Aunt Sophy engrossed by the delicate health of little Nonny; and even at best, these tender monitresses were too far away, for the daily emergencies of life. But Mrs. Wroughton would be ever at hand to advise, and her little cousin to comfort her.—She should henceforward be the happiest—the *very* happiest girl in the world.—

Remembering the gratification she had herself derived from the preparations made for her

at Harrals, she obtained her father's sanction to some little exercise of her own fancy in the apartments to be devoted to the use of her aunt and cousin. Mrs. Wroughton's rooms were to be grave and solid, as suited the sobriety of matronhood; but little Hilda's, adjoining, were to be all cheerfulness and light;—the hangings, the china, of the softest and gayest hues. A choice library of juvenile books was removed from her own school-room; and it was much that she did not complete her preparations for poor little Hilda by a wax-doll as large as the one formerly supplied with mustachios by their cousin Edgar.

So eagerly was she engrossed by her task, that both her father and Aunt Bessy thought it right to moderate her enthusiasm.

"Remember, darling," said the latter, "that your little cousin has not been used to these things; and too much exhibition of luxury might shock her as an ostentatious display of patronage."

"Be careful, my dear Netta," hinted, on the other hand, the niggardly Sir John, "not to inspire your cousin with tastes inappropriate to her condition.—As her fortune will be small, it would be wrong to mislead her mother into the idea that I mean to increase it.—Many things are unsuitable for Hilda Wroughton, which are mere necessaries of life to——"

He was on the point of being betrayed into saying the "heiress of Lynchcombe." But he recollected himself in time to modify his peroration into—"the position of your father's daughter."

Obedience to his injunctions was readily promised. Just then, Janetta would have promised any thing; so thoroughly were all the warm impulses of her young nature stirred by the prospect of such an accession to their family circle. She did not want to be released from her close attendance upon her father. But she felt that all parties would be benefited by an occasional change.—Two persons seemed lost amidst the magnificence of Harrals:

For o'er that house there hung a solemn gloom,
The step fell timid in each gorgeous room,
Vast, sumptuous, dreary as some Eastern pile,
Where mutes keep watch,—a home without a smile;—

a home in which she had almost dreaded the arrival, from Eton, of her noisy, mirth-loving brother; to promote whose amusements, her father would not have consented to forego his severely exacted claims upon her time.

But now, all would become cheerful and sociable.—New life would kindle in that torpid atmosphere. Though Mrs. Wroughton was hastening from Germany, that she might be spared its Christmas trees and all the opening tumults of the Carnival, she would not, of course, object to the subdued gaiety of a happy family circle.

Harry came first:—Harry, with his "soul in arms and eager for the fray" of covert-shooting and three meets a week. Though, before his great coat was thrown aside, he had hurried through a thousand questions concerning his father's accident, and loudly denounced the "muffishness of those who had been unable to detect

the skulking offender, or unwilling to bring him to justice "—before he was half answered, he was off to the stables, to look at the hack and two hunters provided for him by Sir John. From which expedition he rushed back to tax his sister with having said so little, in her letters, in favour of their cousin Edgar.

"*There* you have been, bothering me for the last fortnight, Netta," cried he, "about these sauerkraut Wroughtons, who are coming in their sackcloth and ashes, to fling a pall over all our Christmas fun; and scarcely given a word to young Molyneux, who, I find from Jem and Tandy, is the second-best goer with the Pytchley, and liked by high and low. In the stables, they're all talking of him. When is he coming here?—Or when can I ride over to the Castle, to make his acquaintance?"—

But Janetta was not to be moved to more than careless answers. It was not *his* arrival she was looking for. A letter with the Dover postmark had made its appearance, to acquaint

Sir John that his sister and niece had landed, and were already on the road.

Next day, the carriage was dispatched to meet them at the Hurdiston Station; and in the interim, how anxiously were the eyes of the pretty little heiress fixed upon the time-piece in the drawing-room,—a gorgeous mockery in ormolu and malachite of the solemn face and dusty feet of Father Time. For Sir John had insisted on proceeding alone to meet the travellers. Perhaps he wished to favour his sister with a few admonitory lessons touching the reserve to be observed towards his daughter; to whom, heiress as she was, no further deference was to be conceded than towards any anterior daughter of the house of Harrals.

Netta, meanwhile, was agitating herself to a degree almost disgraceful in a pupil of that self-possessed Miss Avesford, who saw nothing but dignity in the self-sacrifice of the King of Spain, who sat composedly to be suffocated by a brasier, in order that the etiquette of his court might

remain inviolate. Even Sir John was shocked by the impetuous way in which she rushed down into the hall to welcome her aunt, before the great portals were closed, to exclude a volley of wind which compelled her to embrace a great deal of damp crape veil, as well as her new relative.

Mrs. Wroughton was leaning on her brother's arm. But whose could be the slim figure, taller than either herself or Netta, also arrayed in solemn black? — Was it the little child's governess, or attendant?—No! the little child herself;—Hilda Wroughton,—no votary of dolls,—but a beautiful girl of seventeen!

How surprised and how pleased was Harry Wraysbury's glance at his sister that day across the dinner-table!—Not with the feelings of admiration or exultation in the beauty of their new relative that might have inspired her cousins Edgar or Olave. But because relieved from the anxiety uppermost in his mind, that with a little girl established in the house, governesses

and school-rooms were inevitable. And of all the detestations his warmth of heart had ever allowed him to cherish, was the perpendicular preceptress who had presided over the early martyrdom of Netta.—He took less heed than his father or sister of the surpassing beauty of Miss Wroughton; but thanked goodness that a young lady of her inches must be sufficiently stored with grammar, geography, and the use of the globes, to dispense with tuition.

In Sir John, however, the surprise arising from his niece's distinction of air was not of a nature altogether agreeable. Not that he was jealous in behalf of his daughter.—The representative of Adam Wraysbury was not the man to imagine that a new Helen would be capable of entering into competition with the heiress of Lynchcombe.

But he was sorry to see so little of the Woolston exhibited in her person; and if, in moral qualities as well as appearance, she should take after her scamp of a father?—If her mind

should be as crooked as her form was erect?—If, with the delicately defined nostril, the oval face, the fine forehead, the long black eyelashes, that brought Wroughton painfully before him, she should combine his insidious obliquity of character?

He almost trembled at the idea, as with downcast eyes poor Hilda sat, overpowered by thé splendours and numerous attendance of the dinner service.—It was with difficulty, indeed, that the kindly efforts of Miss Wraysbury extorted a word from her. *This* cousin certainly seemed to make up in taciturnity for the garrulous propensities of Edgar and Harry.

The latter, luckily, talked for them all; of what and whom he had seen that morning at the meet, and what and whom he had *not* seen; and how, young Molyneux, being among the latter, he had made up his mind to ride to the Castle the following day, and invite Edgar to come and help him shoot the pheasants. "Somers, the head-keeper, had informed him that the season

was advancing, and that the birds must be shot down."

To this, the first demonstration on the part of the future Woolston of Harrals, his father would probably have opposed a slight remonstrance, but that on the day of his sister's inauguration, and while the travellers still looked so weary from their journey, he was unwilling to cast a further gloom on their spirits.—The young Etonian, therefore, was allowed to rattle on; his sister being probably the only person present who referred his high spirits to his buoyant age; and saw in his fine open, sparkling countenance, indications of a thousand virtues. She longed to learn what Lord Dinton and Uncle Farmer thought of her handsome, animated Harry.—But not half so much as she longed for the means of making up her own mind concerning her beautiful but over-ceremonious cousin.

## CHAPTER X.

WHILE these changes were progressing at Harrals, poor old Denny Cross was undergoing a process of transmutation equally important.—When Christmas arrived, to clothe the humble old village church with branches of laurustinus and holly, and the grateful village poor with linsey-wolsey and frieze, presented (as a thank-offering, perhaps,) by Lord Dinton,—only two months of his probation remained to be accomplished. The late Earl had died in August. In February—the month sacred to St. Valentine,—there was to be a new Countess in the county.

The old house itself seemed conscious of the approaching change.—Anxious to prepare it, as far as her means would allow, for the bride to be brought home by her brother, immediately after her own marriage, Bessy had been working away for months at such furniture as mere industry would supply: and had, perhaps, more real delight in fitting on the new covers and hanging the new curtains, than was derived by her brother-in-law at Harrals, from the grandest of his carved side-boards or costliest of his cabinets.—Her father was no longer capable of being vexed by innovation; and it was therefore easy to enliven by a cheerful paper the dim old parlour, and replace the threadbare drugget by a solid Turkey carpet,—a wedding gift from the Earl.

All was becoming as bright as bright could be; and so pleasantly were the simple changes accomplished, and so cheerful an interest was taken in them by all parties concerned, that, instead of the usual complaints about the

slowness and stupidity of workmen, the fastidious Edgar seemed quite as delighted as the jolly Hugh, at finding himself surrounded with paste-pots and snippings of chintz. As to Lord Dinton, he was as anxiously concerned in the placing of the new chimney ornaments presented by his nephew to the future Mrs. Hugh, and the introduction of one or two lounging chairs to replace the straight-backed horsehair instruments of torture in which for the last half-dozen years he had so thoroughly enjoyed his martyrdom, as if he had never frequented the gilded saloons of Belgravia, or did not call his own a Castle possessing its quarter of a mile of state apartments.

If poor Bessy's dimpled mouth and heart-lighted eyes smiled even more pleasantly than usual, there was other reason for it than the admirable fitting of the sofa-cover she had so dextrously cut out, or the admirable match to the carpet exhibited by the new rug.—The minor instincts of the weaker sex were not so

wanting in her nature, but that the daily arrival of the cases containing the simple but handsome *trousseau* with which the Farmers had claimed the privilege of supplying her, excited considerable satisfaction.

It was not that a man like Lord Dinton was likely to think more of her in a velvet gown than in woollen; or to fancy her kind face embellished by rich draperies of Brussels-lace. —But she wished to do honour to the position he was assigning her. She wished to appear to advantage in the eyes of those whose judgment he valued.—And when assured by the attached old servant who presided at the tryings on of the bridal dress sent down by her sister Sophy, that she looked like an angel, her blush was as girlish as Janetta Wraysbury's might have been under the same delicate circumstances.

Though Lord Dinton, as he sat day after day contemplating her quiet happiness, was of opinion that there needed only a glory round that lovely head to render it that of a saint, it

was not unsatisfactory to hear herself promoted by others to the higher dignity which, though angels are supposed to be sexless, is usually appropriated to the feminine gender.

It was unquestionably very like an angel she bore with the saucy hoaxing and chaffing of her untameable nephew Harry; who maintained a schoolboy's privilege to create perpetual embarrassment for any couple on the eve of matrimony; and though Edgar was restrained by the dignity of his beard, and perhaps respect for his uncle, from joining in the young Etonian's indiscretion, his approving laugh was seldom wanting.—For the time, in short, Denny Cross enjoyed all the mirth which was temporarily suppressed at the Castle and Harrals by the predominance of bombazine. —And though Lord Dinton, on his return from town, whither he was occasionally summoned by the progress of the noble settlements in preparation for his bride, lectured the two boys on the practical jokes promoted during his

absence by Uncle Hugh, they seldom waited till his back was turned, to resume the merry mood which they persisted was the indispensable preliminary to a wedding.

"Besides," added Harry, "you owe us some compensation, dear Aunt Bessy, for all the mumps and dumps we are undergoing at Harrals. Since the arrival of the disconsolate widow, the governor has sunk fathoms deep into the Slough of Despond; and is becoming nearly as confirmed a hypochondriac as the man in Zimmerman, who fancied himself a barley-corn, and dared not go out, for fear of being pecked up by his own chickens.—Though as well as ever he was in his life, my Aunt Wroughton persuades him that alarming consequences may still result from his election knock on the head; and that the stone is stil lodged in his temple. Noise,—light—and music,—are consequently interdicted."

"And your cousin Hilda?"

"Oh! Hilda is worse than her mother:—

looks like the Tragic Muse in a picture-book, and talks to match."

"But you did not surely expect to find her very lively so soon after her father's death?"

"I expected to find her natural. When people are sorry, they cry.—Hilda never sheds a tear: but she goes prosing away to Netta, like old Hawtrey after a shindy in the upper school."

"Netta, however, seems very fond of her,"—interrupted Miss Pennington.

"And more's the pity!—See if she don't spoil my darling little sister!—Edgar!—Isn't it true, that, since Hilda Wroughton arrived at Harrals, Netta is no longer the same creature?"

"We are none of us the same creatures," replied young Molyneux. "We are all raven-struck—all growing solemn. For my part, I am beginning to be afraid that

'My soul from out the shadow that lies floating on the floor,
Will be lifted nevermore.'"

"Oh! won't it, just!" rejoined the Etonian.

"Wait till the weather changes, and we meet at Warling Gorse. Your soul will be lifted high enough, then; going it like a good 'un in no time."

"The sinister influence of the German witch has not yet reached the hunting field," rejoined Edgar, laughing, "because, for better security, I've had a horse-shoe nailed over my stable-door,

'To be lifted nevermore!'

But it *is* hard to see dear Netta's cheerful face growing so thoughtful."

That cheerful face, however, was frozen by other influences than her cousin supposed. — She was miserable at witnessing the profound sorrow of her new friend. Often afraid of having given her offence, Netta was constantly doubtful of having failed to afford her pleasure. Her pretty rooms,—the rare exotics rifled from the conservatory to adorn it,—the beautiful engravings embellishing the walls,—the dainty porcelain,—the trinkets of "barbaric gold

and pearl,"—seemed not so much as to attract the notice of Hilda.

One morning, about ten days after her arrival, while Harry was off to the Castle for snipe-shooting, the two girls were standing together at the window of Miss Wroughton's sitting-room, watching their father and mother, pursuing their prescribed promenade on the terrace below.—The brother and sister appeared to be enjoying the clear frosty weather; confiding to each other the truism which they believed to be a discovery of their own—though divulged to mankind by Solomon so many thousand years ago, — that "All is vanity and vexation of spirit."—*Désabusé du monde*, each wanted to render the other equally discriminating.

"Poor mamma looks sadly worn and fagged," murmured Hilda, more to herself than to her companion.

"Unluckily for my father,"—rejoined Miss Wraysbury; "who, since so reduced by medical treatment, has required cheering and

rousing. But nothing seems to raise the spirits of Mrs. Wroughton."

"They will rise in time," replied Hilda, gravely. "They will rise when they *ought*. The pleasant site of this cheerful house should cure, like the gales of Milton's Paradise, 'all sadness but despair.'"

"I am glad, most glad, to hear you say so," —rejoined Netta, with tears in her eyes, and longing to enfold her cousin's slender waist in a sisterly embrace. "I was beginning to fear you had taken a prejudice against Harrals."

"A prejudice?" reiterated Hilda, turning towards her, with the first smile that Netta had noted on her face.

"You seem to like nothing here. You have never expressed a particle of pleasure in any of your new belongings."

"Belongings? — What belongings?" — again repeated Miss Wroughton, a little bewildered.

"All that this room contains;—all that I

took such delight in selecting for you before your arrival."

"Not exclusively for *me*, surely, Netta?"

"Have you never noticed, then, that every thing bears your initials—H. W.?"

"No, indeed," rejoined her cousin, startled, on taking up a velvet blotting-book from the table by her side, to find it so marked, in gold embroidery of the most delicate kind.

"I worked that for you myself," said Netta, —perceiving how closely she was examining it.

"Dearest cousin!—How kind!—*Too* kind! But even had I noticed it before, I should have fancied the initials your own. Netta is often used as the diminutive of Henrietta."

"You will not like it the less, I hope, because the work is mine,—the book yours?"

Hilda was silent for a moment. "I wonder whether you will like *me* the less," said she, at length, "for telling you the exact truth?"

"No, no,—*certainly* not."

"Then the exact truth is, that, for such things, I entertain not the smallest value. Don't be affronted, dearest Netta. I prize highly the kindness of heart which prompted you to devote your time to your expected guest. But for baubles and fine furniture, I care no more than the bird does which is flitting past the window."

Miss Wraysbury sat quietly down to listen. But her colour went and came. She was not accustomed to have home truths so plainly uttered. But when Hilda, who stood looking out of the window as if watching the bird to which she had alluded, turned suddenly towards her, the tears streaming down her cheeks, proved that her plain speaking was in earnest,—not in scorn.

"I owe that much wisdom to my father, Netta," she continued, hastily brushing away her tears:—"my poor father, whom, doubtless, you have heard spoken of with such bitterness."

"I never heard him more than named,"—replied Netta.—"*My* father seldom alludes to his family."

"In this instance, heartily do I thank him! —Knowing they were at variance, I was afraid my uncle might have dealt as harshly with his name as the rest of the world."—She drew a convulsive breath,—a heavy, heavy sigh,—ere she proceeded.—"I was not often with him.—But when we *were* together, he imparted to *me* the lessons taught to himself by the severe schooling of experience. Though my uncle may have spared him, you will hear some day or other, Netta, that my poor father had been profligately extravagant; and that he had even recourse to disreputable means to secure his selfish enjoyments.—It was so,—and it was from himself I learned it.—But he told me also, that for his vices he was indebted to parents far more profligate than himself: for they left him only a name to which he was not legally entitled, after rearing him in the midst of

luxury, to which their own title was still more disputable. — Idle, useless, penniless, he was brought up an idolator of the trivialities of life."

"Do not agitate yourself thus, dear Hilda," said her cousin, soothingly,—as much terrified by her rising sobs, as she had once been by the repressed choler of her father.

"I must speak of all this, once, that I may recur to it no more," rejoined Hilda Wroughton.—"Otherwise, you will never understand me. Since we are to live together as sisters, dear Netta, (for which GOD be thanked,) you must learn that contempt of the luxuries of life has not been coldly preached to me, as a lesson, but branded into my heart of hearts, by shame,—by misery—by the sight of a parent's remorse.—My father, almost on his death-bed, bad me not only despise the toys of life for their worthlessness, but *loathe* them as the source of his errors."

Janetta, fondly pressing her hand, besought

her to dismiss this painful subject. But Hilda would not be entreated.

"Do not fancy, however, dear cousin," added she, "that I blame in *you* tastes that may be innocently indulged,—nay, that belong to your position in life."

"If I only exactly understood," pleaded the heiress of Lynchcombe, "what you mean by the toys of life?—Where is the line to be drawn, —and *who* is to define it?—Do you include pictures for instance,—objects of high art,—objects of *virtû?*"

"I include the *superfluous*,—to whichever of the senses it may address itself;—I include music,—paintings,—sculpture,—costly fare,—exquisite wines,—gorgeous plate—"

"Oh, Hilda! do not class such incongruous things together!" cried Netta, almost shocked by the practical views of her cousin. "A good dinner, and one of Raphael's Holy Families!"

"Well, I may perhaps exaggerate.—My experience and principles have been formed on an

abject scale.—The great first law imprinted in my mind has been to acquire no new appetites and indulge no tastes, leading to unlawful expense."

"More than one man of genius," said Netta, in an extenuating tone, "has been a collector of rarities in every branch of the fine arts; Walpole,—Scott,—Peel,—Beckford——"

"I should like to pick a quarrel with your classification of men of genius," retorted Hilda, endeavouring to smile. "But pleasant arguments often degenerate into unpleasant quarrels. Let me, however, repeat the remark lately made to me by a dear and enlightened friend,—that the collection to which Horace Walpole devoted a life that might have been better employed, has been already scattered to the winds; and that Scott, the great and glorious, might have been spared for years to his country, but for the severe mental exertions created by liabilities arising from the gimcrackery of Abbotsford."

Janetta's thoughts were already wandering.

This was by no means the first time her enthusiastic cousin had backed her own logic by allusion to the opinions of a dear and valued friend. She dared not exclaim, in the language of her Majesty's faithful Commons, "Name! name!" —But her curiosity was not the less lively. She could not help suspecting,—at eighteen the imagination is volatile,—that Hilda's contempt for foppery, or rather, for every thing less than positive in this world of necessities, was quite as much attributable to the anonymous philosopher, as to the father concerning whose injured memory she was so susceptible.

Her cogitations were luckily interrupted by a loud clattering of hunting-boots along the corridor; and the sound of her name too noisily invoked for any lips short of those of a school-boy-brother.

"Netta, Netta! — where are you? where have you hid yourself?—*Such* a day's sport!—*Such* a burst!—*Such* a run!"—Then, after a vehement tapping at the door of his cousin

Hilda's dressing-room, and a hurried "May I come in?" that waited for no answer, — in rushed the mud-stained boy, holding in his hand a fox's brush, that bore evident signs of recent amputation.

"Good morning, Hilda.—Darling Nettums, did you ever see such a beauty?—What Berty Grandison calls a plume for a Tambour Major! —And such a tag!—I've a right to be proud of it, for I promise you I won it like a trump. Tiger carried me—no matter—keep your eye on 'Bell's Life' next Sunday, and you'll find news of us."

Miss Wraysbury knew by experience that she had no alternative but to take the bleeding trophy cheerfully into her hand, without remonstrating against the nature of the Sunday studies provided for her.—The philosophy of submission to the more savage sex had reached her by virtue of Pennington descent.

"I mean to send it to town and get it mounted for you, with a beautiful ivory handle,"

resumed Harry, on receiving back from her hands the unsavoury trophy.—"That is, on condition that you hang it up beside your whip-rack, and don't pretend to pass it off as

> 'Won by no hands as you may guess,
> Save those of Fairly fair.'

Or worse still, degrade it as that cut and dry utilitarian Professor Avesford did the one I brought you two years ago (as a tribute from poor Berty), by using it to dust the keys of your piano."

"*Noch ein!*"—observed Miss Wroughton, half aside to her cousin, smiling at this family manifestation in favour of the *dulce* over the *utile.*

But Netta shook her head. She would not, even in jest, hear of classing a fox's brush, though even mounted on the richest of ivory handles, under the head of artistic treasures.

## CHAPTER XI.

"UNCLE," said Edgar to Lord Dinton, as they were trudging together through the woods adjoining the Castle a few days afterwards, attended by a couple of keepers and a Clumber spaniel and setter or two, and better still, by a cheering winter sun,—"if you do not interfere a little, at Harrals, they will spoil our Netta for us!"—

"Not they!" replied the Earl, not a little amused by this sudden start.

"But how can you answer for it,—you, who notice just now nothing that passes on the face

of the earth, out of the parlour at Denny Cross?"

"A sad account of me, Edgar. But I know thus much of what passes in a higher sphere:—that GOD takes care of his own. Such a nature as Janetta Wraysbury's was not created to be so readily spoiled. The seeds of mischief, if sown, would not germinate.—But what do you see so very terrible in progress at Harrals?"

"I have no opportunity of seeing any thing. Since the arrival of the Wroughtons, I have been so systematically snubbed, that I have raised the siege and marched off my troops. I seldom go there now:—never, except for a gossip with Harry."

"It is from *him*, then, you gather your information?"

"It does not amount to more than that those two young girls mew themselves up all day long over their German and counterpoint;—Schiller, in the study,—then Bach, at the old organ."

"So far, no great harm," said Lord Dinton,

while his companion put up and brought down a pheasant.

"Yes, it *is* harm,"—objected Edgar, after the bird had been bagged, "because such a mode of life is not natural to Netta; and if our little linnet is to parrot the sublime flights of her Black Eagle cousin, there will be a singing bird the less in the world. I remember her telling me once, that when Miss Avesford declaimed the tirade of Camilla, it made her shudder as if an adder were in her path; and how she used to cry over Andromaque!—We shall soon be having her burn her Racine."

"No great matter," again rejoined Lord Dinton. "In a couple of months, Edgar, we shall all be settled in town, and then these poor girls are to be screwed up to concert-pitch by the masters in vogue, and taught every thing it is least useful for them to know.—Again a few months, and in the struggle of society, they will probably meet with *lords* and masters; and lo! the real lessons of life will begin."

Edgar discharged both barrels at a hare which crossed their path at a sufficient distance to insure missing her;—perhaps as a pretext for the angry ejaculation that followed.

But Lord Dinton, while pretending indifference to his nephew's communication, perhaps to probe the extent of his interest in the question, was by no means pleased at what he heard.—From the first, he had deeply regretted to see the daughter and pupil of a materialist like Wroughton, established so near this sweetest of Eves.

"I must speak to Bessy," mused he, as the uncle and nephew concluded, with a still increasing space between the two, their morning's sport.—"Netta must take her cousin over with her to Denny Cross, at her first visit, and Bessy will readily find out whether any thing is to be feared.—Like the Venetian glasses that explode at the touch of poison, the pure nature of Bessy affords an exquisite test."

And right satisfactory was the result. Bessy

smiled at the idea of danger from that gifted and high-minded girl.

"There is some trace of Netta in her German cousin," she replied to the close questioning of the Earl, "though set in a different key."

By degrees, he elicited every detail of the visit; — the kind messages sent by Mrs. Wroughton, who, during her former sojourn in England, had visited Denny Cross with poor Maria, and even then, seemed drooping and depressed.

"Hilda is deeply attached to her mother," resumed Bessy, "and it tells well for both, that, though so highly educated, she remains as artless as a child."

"How can you tell?—Why, you are a child yourself, my little woman!" cried Lord Dinton. "A well-grown baby might impose upon you."

"A well-grown baby, but not a full-grown impostor."

"But what makes you pronounce this German damsel artless? — Because she fell into

ecstasies at sight of your lawns and laces,—your diamonds and pearls?"

"On the contrary, all the ecstasies were Netta's. I don't believe Miss Wroughton knows the difference between silk and cotton. Deficient as I am in the mysteries of fashion, *she* is far more behind-hand. No! I pronounce her to be simple-hearted, because, when I was beating about the bush concerning Edgar, and hinting, during Netta's absence on a short visit to her grandfather's bed-side, your nephew's dissatisfaction at being all but excluded from Harrals, she met the question as if it had been frankly expressed. 'My mother has probably discouraged his visits,' she said. 'From living so long abroad, she has adopted the foreign system of secluding young girls with almost conventual rigour. But in my cousin Edgar's case, there are still stronger motives for ungraciousness. *His* mother,—her sister,—her own sister,—and for many years past her only sister,—who took so little notice of her during

the trials of her married life that it had almost better have been none,—has taken to correspond with her since our adoption by my uncle. The first letter that reached mamma after our installation at Harrals was one from the Molyneuxes,—wife, husband, or both,—I forget,—expressly warning her against sanctioning any intimacy between Edgar and myself.—At our age, they said, attachments arose before people were aware of it; and they had other views for their son."

"*So* like Gerald and his wife!" interrupted Lord Dinton.—"The very thing to put it into the heads of the young people!"

"Not as regards Hilda. You would have been indignant — (at least both myself and Netta, who had now rejoined us, had a hard matter to find patience with her,) — had you heard Miss Wroughton exclaim against being captivated by so heartless, soulless, and useless a being, as her cousin Edgar."

"Did she so?—Then, by Jove, the chances

are, that she is more than half in love with him already!" cried Lord Dinton.—"I told you, Bessy, you were a little goose!—Well! and when you had taken his part, and what Harry Wraysbury calls pitched properly into her—"

"That I should live to hear you quoting Eton slang!—I did *not* take his part. I thought it wanted no taking.—Instead of fighting a superfluous battle, I invited her to accompany Netta to our wedding, as one of my bridesmaids."

"Why, we shall have a procession worthy of the Freischütz!" cried Lord Dinton.—"But I daresay the German muse declined stepping from the clouds for so sublunary a purpose?"

"On the contrary, she was charmed at the invitation. She had so much wanted, she said, to be asked."

"And her mourning for her father?"

"Is to be laid aside for a day. She said something about being little wedded to forms."

"So much the worse. But no matter. It is difficult for me to spy a fault just now, in either men, women, or things."

The girls, meanwhile, had enjoyed in their visit to Denny Cross quite as much satisfaction as they imparted. The angelic softness of Bessy's countenance and temper, made a deep impression on the heart of the German girl.

"A realized idyll!" was her inward thought. —But at sober Denny Cross, she found it necessary to keep many of her thoughts to herself.

Even Mrs. Wroughton entered with interest into their details of the beautiful *trousseau;* and the greatness so singularly thrust upon a family, which in her earlier days at Harrals, the Woolstons had held in sovereign contempt.

"Who would ever have surmised," Sir John had whispered, when the forthcoming event was first discussed between them, "that the Lord Wilchester who used to come over and shoot with me, when we were brother Cantabs, and who, being too shy even to open his mouth, my

father fancied would take a fancy to poor Carry, whose compassionate nature was always for helping a lame dog over a stile, would wait all these years for a wife, and choose one, at last, within a few miles of our park palings!"

"Or who would have thought that one of the Denny Cross girls, whom my poor father so delighted to disparage, should deal such a blow to the pride of Emma and her husband!"

"*Their* disappointment must be tolerably severe," rejoined Sir John, with an air of scarcely disguised satisfaction.

"But the strangest part of all, is to hear of Bessy as still beautiful, and of Lord Wilchester as a young man. Our career, dear John, is ended.—*Theirs*, about to begin."

Against this decree, the self-love of Sir John Wraysbury rebelled.

"Nothing very surprising in it," said he. "My brother-in-law, Farmer, was ten years older when he married. As to our public existence,

we are starting together, as contemporaries ought. Though my essay is to be made in the Commons, and Dinton's in the Lords, we are both on the threshold of a new career."

Mrs. Wroughton had been too long an exile from England to enter readily upon the puzzling field of English politics.

It was a pleasanter occupation to busy herself with the white muslin and white satin of the two bridesmaids, who, with Lady Mary and Lady Jemima, were to accompany the happy Bessy to the altar.

Harry was by this time once more up to his ears in Homer and hockey-stick: so that they were not only relieved from his importunate quizzing, but from the inquisition into their movements, exercised, through his means, by cousin Edgar.

The homely wedding of Hugh Pennington was not to be solemnised till a week after the grander ceremonial. *He* declared, that he did not choose to be over-trumped in the matrimo-

nial game by a Cupid whose quivers were surmounted by a coronet.—But the real motive of the postponement was, that he might preside over the instalment at the Castle of the poor old squire, while the Dintons paid a short bridal visit to Havermead, an estate which the Earl had insisted on presenting to his bride.

"It was the first present made me by my father," said he. "And just as I received it, shall the deed of gift be transferred to my dearest Bessy."

Sir John Wraysbury was the only member of the extensive family circle who seemed to hear more than enough of all these wedding preparations. It did not suit him to be so thoroughly in eclipse. People had ceased to inquire after his health; and the county gossips were just then far busier with the future Countess of Dinton, than with the heiress of Lynchcombe.—No one evinced the slightest curiosity about even the part he was to take, on the ensuing meeting of parliament; and his daughter

and niece seemed to care far more for the newly-furnished parlour at Denny Cross, than for the gorgeous mansion awaiting them in Carlton Gardens. Netta was looking forward to the arrival of the Farmers, and her sister, Hilda; to some unexplained pleasure connected with the wedding day.

It was perhaps as an outlet for the ill-humour which he did not care to exhibit at home, that the new M.P. began to interest himself just then, for the first time, in the statistics of his game-books. A lukewarm sportsman, he had hitherto legislated somewhat loosely over his hares and pheasants. But now that Harry was growing up, largely endowed with that organ of destructiveness, the development of which creates heroes in connection with Minié rifles, and no-matter-whats in connection with Purdays and Nocks, —it was essential that the credit of his preserves should be worthy of the heir of Harrals, and capable of rivalling Edgar's boasted sportmanship at the Castle.

During the recent holidays, a battue had taken place, the returns of which were very mortifying to Sir John.—Though Molyneux Castle allowed its hares to be shot down by the tenants, and was so proverbially liberal of its game, that pheasants and partridges had ceased to be a luxury (or a nuisance) to the neighbouring farmers, Harrals, with all its poacher affrays and prosecutions, was disgracefully in arrear.—Even Harry felt ashamed of the beggarly account of empty game bags; and was not slow in retailing to his father the accusations brought in extenuation by his keepers against one or two of his tenant farmers, more especially against young Bothamley, of Ash Bank, a nephew of Mrs. Harpsden.

They were accordingly desired to keep watch and bring proof, so as to ensure conviction.—For the J.P. predominated just then in the mind of the M.P.; and he felt that it would be refreshing to have a relative of the Reverend William committed to durance vile. Kit Bo-

thamley and his faithful lurcher were often seen skulking toward the Harrals woods at night-fall, about the time that the crack of a Manton was occasionally heard in the distance.

Though so long self-exiled from Northamptonshire, Sir John had re-enrolled himself, within the last six months, in the *Vehm Gericht* of his country neighbours, to forward the grand country-gentleman duties of game preserving and agricultural distress preserving. As his highly respectable political opinions squared with those of his distant neighbour, the Marquis of Marington, his lordship's second son, Lord Algernon Rawdon, the most active committee-man of Sir John Wraysbury's election, had entered with him into an inter-magisterial alliance, whereby the poachers on the Harrals estate were grappled by the warrants and constables of Marington Manor, and *vice-versâ*.

Sir John had little trouble with the Marington population. For the marquis was both an

old man and an equitable;—much fonder of his peasants than his pheasants.—His eldest son was a wanderer in the East; and Lord Algernon a theoretical politician, too much absorbed in studying the constitution and the chances of reforming the reformed parliament, to care more for the *feræ naturæ* of his native shire, than as one of the less ostensible elements of bribery and corruption, whereby the grand bond of party is every where maintained; and to gratify the Honourable Member, on whose voice and influence he counted largely, his lordship consented to place the Dogberrys of Marington in co-operation with the keepers of Harrals.

The result was an affray, which placed one of these minor tyrants on a wooden leg for the remainder of his days, and Kit Bothamley and one of the cowherds of Ash Bank in quod.—Without having incurred the odium of personally committing to prison a brother-in-law of his contemned relative at the Rectory, Sir John ex-

perienced the intense gratification of knowing that his foot was upon the neck of a family whom he reckoned as his worst-wishers in the parish.

## CHAPTER XII.

NEARLY ten days after this catastrophe, and within a week of the long-settled wedding-day, Edgar rode over to Denny Cross ; whose cheerful home circle was extended by the arrival of the Farmers.

" I told you, my boy, we should be here with the crocuses," said the old lawyer, heartily welcoming his young friend.—" Just in time to witness the signing of the settlements.—I have treated myself to a patent pen and pair of spectacles on new and scientific principles, for the purpose."

" At all events, I'm glad to find you here,"

was the reply. "Your arrival will leave less leisure for Aunt Bessy to fret over the news I have to communicate."

Miss Pennington looked anxious. The soft dimples had already vanished from her mouth.

"Don't look so frightened.—You are only asked to resign his company for a day," said Edgar, cheerfully.

"Whose?—Dinton's?"—demanded Farmer, a little surprised. "When I heard your horse just now, I hoped it was *him*. I have not seen him these three months."

"Nor Aunt Bessy these twenty hours: which is the reason she looks so savage at finding herself put off till to-morrow."

"But *why* put off?" mildly inquired Sophia.

"Inquire of one Elizabeth Pennington, spinster:—as usual, the cause of the mischief."

But Aunt Bessy, instead of looking savage, looked so sorrowful, that Edgar had not the heart to pursue his vein of bantering.

"The fact is," said he, in a more rational tone, "my uncle is labouring under a cold and sore-throat, which the family imagine is about to turn to influenza. And as he was much the worse for being detained here yesterday till the raw of the evening, by one who I am happy to see look penitent for her fault, they have persuaded him to stay at home, this rainy day, to make much of his fireside."

"Quite right,—quite right," replied Farmer. "Dinton and I have left the age of rashness far behind us.—But what news do you bring from Harrals, Edgar?"

"How do you know I have been at Harrals?" was the brisk rejoinder."

"By inference. Because it is quite out of your road; and you look too fagged and heated to have come direct from the Castle."

Edgar looked more than fagged;—he looked harassed and worried. Besides, he hated being what he called "placed in the witness-box," by Roger Farmer.

"When is Netta coming to see her sister?" persisted the old man.

"I don't know.—Not to-day, certainly."

"Why not to-day? She was fully prepared for our arrival," added Mrs. Farmer. "And we have not seen her so long!"

"She has other engagements, I believe;—perhaps previous engagements,"—replied young Molyneux, carelessly. "My Uncle Wraysbury, too, is away; he is gone into Dorsetshire. He had some business to hurry through at Lynchcombe, in order to be back in time for the wedding."

"What is all this about Dinton's illness?" cried Hugh Pennington,—bursting into the room without so much as removing his wide-awake,—but shaking hands cordially with his sister and Farmer while he spoke,—for he had been from home at the moment of their arrival, an hour or two before.

"Only that he has got the influenza, and that they are coddling him at the Castle," replied

Farmer, answering for Edgar, who seemed in far from the best of humours.

"Is that all?—Thank GOD!—One of Lord Marington's men told me, just now, on the road, that Dr. Gardiner was prevented going to the Grange to-day, because detained at the Castle by Lord Dinton's serious illness."

"To which you of course answered, that his lordship was under your roof yesterday, till it was more than time that he should be under his own."

"Ay, ay!—I told him 'twas some blunder —and that the Earl was the last man in the county likely to call in a doctor for a sneeze or two.—And now, how are you, Farmer?—And how are *you*, Sophy?—I could scarcely see your face till I was put out of my pain about this absurd report."

"I am just going up to see my father," replied Mrs. Farmer, taking her sister's arm, as a pretext for leading Bessy from the room.—"While we are away, my husband shall answer

for us both.—Your health, dear Hugh, I am glad to see, there is no need to inquire after."

Edgar waited till the door had closed upon them, and even gave them time to ascend the stairs: then, in a suppressed voice, exclaimed—"It is all too true!—My uncle is dangerously ill. I would not appear too eager to return to him, lest it should excite Bessy's suspicions."

His two auditors had now drawn close to him, in troubled anxiety.

"The man was right, then?" said Hugh Pennington, gruffly.. "I was afraid he knew what he was talking about, he looked so downhearted."

"Not downhearted as I am!" faltered Edgar, scarcely able to repress his tears:—"for I am the cause of all."

"But, my dear boy," pleaded Farmer, "you are surely alarming yourself prematurely. Since Lord Dinton was out only yesterday,—out, and well—"

"Out, but *not* well. The heavy oppression

under which he then laboured, we attributed to a severe cold. When he arrived at home, he had a shivering fit,—and retired to bed, where he fell immediately into a comatose state. Before Dr. Gardiner, whom I had previously sent for without the knowledge of the family, arrived, an attack of fever had come on, attended with some degree of delirium."

"So rapidly?" murmured Farmer, with deep anxiety in his countenance.

"His illness commenced four days ago. And now, I am coming to the worst—just two days after a visit, at my entreaty, to Northampton gaol, where typhus fever is raging."

"Then why the deuce, Edgar, did you send him there?" cried Hugh Pennington.

"How was I to know it?—Even my uncle, who is one of the visiting justices, had heard nothing of the matter."

"But why send him there at all?" added Farmer, speaking more mildly than the incensed brother of Bessy.

"It is a long story;—too long for me to tell you now,—for I must be off home. I came only at my grandmother's entreaty, to forestal any rumours that might reach poor Bessy."

"But briefly,—briefly!—What in the world took poor Dinton to that confounded prison?"

"There is a young man there, in whom I am interested, committed (unjustly as it would seem) for poaching on the Harrals estate."

"Well?"

"Sir John, on the evidence of whose keeper the warrant was issued, is away."

"And couldn't you wait a day or two for his return?"

"I wish to Heaven we had. But the friends of people in prison are seldom patient."

"But he cannot be a *friend* of yours, Edgar?"

"Almost a connection.—A nephew of Harpsden's second wife."

"People whom you abhor and avoid!"

"People whom I have always avoided, but

no longer abhor. Even if I did, justice is justice.—And when Netta wrote to me entreating me to bespeak my uncle's interposition during her father's absence—"

"Oh! Netta is at the bottom of the mischief then!" muttered Hugh. — "I might have guessed it."

"Don't say *that!* You wouldn't, were you to see her present agony of distress.—I went to Harrals to give her some intimation and warning of what was going on; and she insisted upon being off directly to the Castle, to comfort and assist my poor aunts.—In short, they are all beside themselves.—For Dr. Gardiner has this morning declared the attack to be malignant fever; and forbidden every one but myself, and my uncle's personal attendants, to approach the room."

"I'll warrant he forbad *you* among the rest, Edgar?"

"But you don't suppose I was going to take any one's orders on such a point?—I, above all!

the sole cause of the misfortune!—I, my poor dear uncle's almost child!"—he added, with the tears fairly streaming down his cheeks.—"No! —I did not enter his room this morning after hearing the worst,— because I was about to visit Harrals, and this house.—But now, I am going back to shut myself up with him, till he is well again.—Good bye,—God bless you both. Take care of Bessy, and keep the sad trouble from her as long as you can."

Hugh Pennington accompanied him to the door, and detained him a minute or two from mounting his horse; endeavouring to dissuade him from the fulfilment of his pious duty.

"I am older, and better able than yourself, Edgar, to push through this heavy trial," said he. "I owe it to Bessy, who has so lightened my own burthen in life, to lighten hers.—Poor Dinton is past distinguishing between us.—Stay you here, boy!—Let me get upon your horse, and hurry back in your place, to the Castle."

"And terrify that poor dear woman to death,

by letting her surmise the worst?—No, my dear Hugh!—Let me alone.—Let us all do our best.—The case is not yet hopeless; and it belongs to those who love him, to lend their aid to it, as he would have done under the same circumstances, to promote the greatest advantage of the greatest number."

Young Molyneux was off like a shot, almost before the words were pronounced; and Hugh, on his return into the house, was not much surprised to find old Farmer in tears.

"There is a great chance in his favour," said he, assuming, though with little confidence in his own predictions, the part of comforter.—"A constitution unimpaired by excesses, may make head against a malady fatal to loose-livers."

It might have been almost fancied that Edgar had thought proper to make them acquainted with the gloomy part he had been most studious to conceal.—For the malignant nature of the fever had been more than confirmed by the

fate of the unfortunate lad whose bonds the Earl had endeavoured to loose.—The visit of young Molyneux to Harrals, had not been prompted solely by desire for an interview with Netta.—The Rectory had preceded the Hall.—He was desirous of learning from Mrs. Harpsden how far poor Lord Dinton's interference had proved advantageous to others, though to himself so injurious; and of sustaining her courage to meet further mischance.—But alas! the house he entered for these good purposes, was in confusion:—Harpsden absent,—his wife drowned in tears,—with a sorrowful little brood of children clinging in silence to her gown.

"Oh! my dear young gentleman,—my dear kind Mr. Molyneux!"—was all he could at first extract from the afflicted woman.

"It was all too late!" she managed at last to articulate.—"Four days in the infirmary, and that ill-used lad was carried off from us for ever!—His father's favourite child!—My poor young nephew!—Harpsden was off at daybreak

to the jail, to see if he could get leave to bring away the body, to lie among his own people in the Ash Bank burying-place. But even, for that, I'm afraid he'll prove too late.—Bob Burdon, too, the cowherd that was took up with poor Christopher, is lying in the fever, as bad (his parents tell me) as may be, to be alive."

All this was a sad hearing.—For humanity's sake, Edgar was deeply grieved.—For the sake of his poor uncle, how fearfully impressed!

"I hav'n't heart,—no, indeed, dear Mr. Molyneux, I hav'n't heart to go over to Ash Bank and see his poor brother," added Mrs. Harpsden, with renewed sobs.—"It'll be quite a break up of their little household,—for Kit, though a rough blade, was dearly loved among us.—You know we're none of us fine folks.—And my poor nephew John will feel his brother's misfortune all the more, that ever since my brother's death, instead of doing a father's part by the boy, as he ought, he has let him run loose, and have his own way; sport-

ing with rod and gun, here, there, and everywhere, as if the beasts of the field and fish of the stream on the land which our people have rented these hundred and ten years, were not by law Sir John Wraysbury's."

Edgar muttered something unpleasant respecting Sir John Wraysbury and his rights, evidently not intended to reach so far as the ear of Mrs. Harpsden.

"If you're going on to the Hall, Mr. Edgar, as is most like," she resumed, in a lower key, "and as you do not often find your way to this house to enable me to send a message, please, sir, be so good as to tell Miss Wraysbury how truly I thank her for having so readily complied with my petition, and procured Lord Dinton's good word in Kit's behalf.—But tell her the worst has come to the worst, and that our poor boy's dead and gone;—(my brother's son, dead in the infirmary of a jail!)—Don't say killed by her father's cruelty,—though 'tis God's truth, Mr. Molyneux. It would grieve her kind heart

too much to know such a thing. I never should have made bold to write to her at all, but for hearing from Olave how good a heart she has,—so different from her money-hardened father!—Olave upholds her for a real angel.—Poor fellow!—a sad blow to him, this family disgrace!—For he dearly loved our Kit; and was always exhorting him and telling him his love of sport, and scorn of the law, might bring him at last to a bad end."

But Edgar cared so little for the feelings and opinions of Mr. Olave Harpsden, that before the worthy stepmother had half finished her panegyric, he was on his way to Harrals Hall.

With Netta, his task was far more difficult. To the kinswoman of poor Kit, it was easy to express unqualified sympathy. From Netta, he had to conceal not only the danger of Lord Dinton, but the evil influence exercised by her father throughout the transaction.

Without asking to see Mrs. Wroughton, he made his way, therefore, direct to the morning

room, where the two girls were occupied, Miss Wraysbury in drawing, her cousin in reading aloud to her. And pleasant for a moment was it to his harassed feelings to find the drawing pencils thrown down, and Netta eagerly seizing his hands, with a welcome such as she had never accorded to him before.—Even Hilda turned towards him with looks of earnest good-will. For the first time in their long cousinship, she greeted him as Edgar.

"How good of you to come!—We wanted so much to see you!" burst simultaneously from the lips of both.—But there was no need for Netta to speak.

> In her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear,
> As pebbles in a brook.

"You will, perhaps, wish that I had stayed away when you hear what sad news I have brought you," said he, reluctant to overcloud those fair bright faces with the sad realities of life.

"It is true, then?"—cried Miss Wraysbury,

dropping his hand. "There has been a report in the house, arising from the servants' hall, that Mr. Harpsden's unfortunate nephew was dangerously ill."

"Would it were no worse. He is *dead*, Netta!—And would even *that* were the worst."

Already, Hilda Wroughton had sunk into a chair, and sat pale and motionless.—But Netta's trembling hand was on his arm, with her eyes riveted interrogatively upon his face.

"My poor uncle, who caught the infection from this *protégé* of yours, when he visited him last week, is in the utmost danger."

"Don't say so, oh! don't say so,—*don't*, Edgar. Think of poor dear Bessy.—Think of all of us!"

"I can think only of *him!*—But I have not a moment to lose; I am off to Denny Cross to prepare them.—What I came here for, dear Netta, was to ask you to go immediately to my poor aunts, who are almost beside themselves. They want somebody to write for them, and

think for them, and above all, to comfort them."

"This very moment," cried Miss Wraysbury, ringing to order the carriage. "But if you meet my Aunt Wroughton, Edgar, before you leave the house, say not a word of all this; or she might object to our going to an infected house."

"If all communication were not cut off between the sick room and the rest of the Castle, do you imagine that I should ask it?—And what do you mean by 'our' going?—I am on horseback. I cannot accompany you."

Miss Wraysbury glanced in an embarrassed manner towards Hilda. They were now so constantly together, that it seemed a matter of course for her cousin to accompany her on her errand of mercy.

"A stranger would be an incumbrance at such a moment," said he, replying to her look with his usual straight-forwardness.

"And I am going where comfort is equally needed," said Hilda, rising and preparing to

leave the room; "where, though a stranger, I shall be welcome."

"You are going *where*, dearest cousin?"—said Netta, following her to the door.

"To the Rectory,"—she replied with a haughty smile; regardless of the contemptuous ejaculation of her cousin Edgar.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THAT month of February, so full of promise in England, so treacherous in performance, passed pleasantly and hopefully in Italy. In Rome, more especially, the Carnival was unusually brilliant.—A few exotic royalties had made the ancient city their halting place for the winter, instead of proceeding to Naples:—partly because, the Neapolitan Court being in august mourning, a crape veil overhung the higher class of its usually brilliant society;—partly because, in addition to the cultivation of the Fine Arts, an accademia for the encouragement of

the Coarse had been recently established. The campagna had now, in rivalship with Melton, its crack pack of foxhounds; and the music of the view halloo carried the day against the notes of San Carlo

Among the most officious of the Great British sportsmen who officiated in the organization of the new hunt, was Gerald Molyneux,—old Molyneux, alas! as he began to be called by the youngsters,—Harrovian and Oxonian contemporaries of his son. Among these incipient Nimrods, he was a great authority:—born in the heart of the Pytchley, and baptized, at riper years, in the waters of the Whissenden brook. He was consequently in the highest spirits; and his means having been nearly doubled by the recent death of his father, his hospitalities were as bright as his hunting coat.

Old Molyneux prided himself on having it said that his dinners were the best in Rome.—Every body has an ambition. That of his wife was to have her *soirées* frequented by the best

Italian society, sprinkled with the more renowned of those rising artists, who promise to perpetuate the halo that consecrates almost as much as devotional feelings, the dome of St. Peter's, or halls of the Vatican. But the Honourable Gerald delighted far more in red coats than red petticoats,—in top-boots than in purple stockings; — and it was *his* glory that the stable should afford the leading topic of conversation at those *recherché* feasts, whose claret and champagne were as undeniable as if drunk at the Trois Frères, or the table of Reuben Howard.

"The fact is, my dear Emma," confided the old beau to his wife,—"we cannot establish ourselves too snugly. For here we are, naturalized as completely as ever Craven was at Naples, or Hertford at Paris.—I *used* to fancy there might come a time for our residing in England. But, by Jove! as things have turned out, I don't care if I never see the white cliffs of Dover again!"

"A couple of months in London, now and then, however, make a pleasant change," said Mrs. Molyneux, languidly. "And Theo., like all girls brought up abroad, is absurdly curious about her native country. 'The island' as she calls it—as Hampshire people do the Isle of Wight!".

"Theo. talks like a very silly girl.—But on the other hand, she rides likes an angel," said old Molyneux, arranging his whiskers with a pocket comb.—"And *that*, she would of course enjoy to perfection in England,—the only place where a decent lady's horse is to be had.—But as I was saying just now, I shall never wish to set foot again in Molyneux Castle, when its honours are done by that confounded Denny Cross dairy-maid."

"It is strange we do not hear from Edgar," observed Mrs. Molyneux. "Theo. and I appear to-night in colours at the Austrian embassy, for the first time these six months;—plain proof that the marriage must be on the eve of so-

lemnization. Half-a-year, you know, was to be the period of probation."

"Better keep on your mourning six months longer, then, in honour of the wedding," retorted old Molyneux, peevishly. — "A Bessy Pennington established at the Castle, and Clara Wroughton in Carlton Gardens, are enough to make one forswear one's country, and turn Mormon or Mussulman."

"With all my heart!" said his wife, amused by his petulance. "But *en attendant*, we must try to afford poor Theo. a season in town.— The Grandisons have bewildered her little head with accounts of the frantic gaiety of a London June."

"I should have fancied that the frantic gaiety of an Italian Carnival might have sufficed her. And those Grandisons only make up to her because they hope to obtain, through us, a better footing at Lynchcombe. — Confoundedly mistaken! If they were up in our family politics, they would know that no *passe par-*

*tout*, given by a member of his own family, is likely to open the house or heart of Sir John."

"One can't tell.—Dinton wrote you word that Edgar got on very well with him."

"Edgar gets on with every body.—His easy, facile manners render him difficult to repulse. I defy even your brother to brutalize Edgar."

"Let us hope that the heiress of Lynchcombe will be equally propitious,"—his wife was beginning; when a girlish voice was heard in the adjoining room, and the door flew open to admit a merry dancing figure, bright as a gleam of sunshine;—their daughter Theodosia, attired in the prettiest of pink ball-dresses, just completed for the evening's fête. In either hand, she held two beautiful coiffures of roses; one pink, one white; between which, she wanted her mother to decide.

"Choose for me,—I can't make up my foolish mind," said she, gaily.

"White,"—replied old Molyneux.

"Pink,"—said his wife.

On which Theo., hovering like a butterfly between them, insisted upon marking her deference to both, by wearing neither. "The Grandisons had often told her she looked better with nothing in her hair." And the ripply, wavy, chesnut curls were shaken playfully from her brow, in conscious beauty, as she spoke; deaf to her father's inquiries of "*which* of the Grandisons?" For *one* of them passed for a favoured adorer of his daughter.

"Do you know, mother," said she, when the obsolete dandy, who was endeavouring to rough-cast the ruins of his good looks into a semblance of sportsmanship, had quitted the room with an oath or two of disgust at the frivolity of his woman-kind, "Do you know it makes me melancholy, to see myself tricked out in gay colours again. It brings poor grandpapa and the old castle strangely before me!—I can just fancy my aunts crying their eyes out at having to exchange *their* black gowns for bridal finery."

"And so they ought; for they have been the

prime movers of this disgraceful match," said Mrs. Molyneux, surveying her daughter's draperies complacently through her *lorgnette*.

"Why *disgraceful*, mamma?—I was always fond of Aunt Wraysbury. The only sister of hers I can recollect, was named Sophia. But Edgar writes me word, Lady Dinton is worth them both put together."

"Lady Dinton!" exclaimed Mrs. Molyneux impatiently. But it was not to her daughter she could admit how confidently she had herself looked forward to bearing the name.

"How I should like to see them all again," said the young Hebe,—in whose mind her pink gown seemed to have called up a train of pleasant reminiscences.—"They were all very good to me. The old castle was as *triste* as St. Angelo.—Yet I was always happy there."

"Children are happy anywhere."

"Not they, dear mamma. I used to hate London;—that everlasting square—those tiresome drives in the park!"

"Yet even London, you sometimes express a wish to see again."

"Yes, as a sight—not as a home.—I want a peep at its great men and public buildings.—I want to buy a three-pommel saddle, and a box of water-colours.—Edgar is wild for us to go over for a few months, this spring. If it were not for the Easter fêtes in perspective, I should wonder how you and papa could absent yourselves from the wedding. But if one of my uncles,—either Lord Dinton or Sir John,—should invite you to stay with them in London, dear mother, *do* go—do *pray* go! I should so very, very much like to see whether English people are as dull and silent in their own world, as they are when on their travels. Berty Grandison declares that they are ten times worse; and that London society is like a magic lantern, with the light omitted by particular desire."

"English society, dull or cheerful, signifies as little to *you*, Theo., as that of St. Petersburg! This match of your uncle's has built up a great

wall of China, between us and our own country. As to a season's visit to London, what purpose could it possibly serve, except to unsettle and mortify you, by bringing you forward in *la queue de la comète*—a mere satellite of the heiress of Lynchcombe!"

"*Pourvu qu'on s'amuse?*"—cried the gay girl.—"And why should I feel humbled by having a cousin richer than myself?—There are compensations for all things. In some respect or other, I am probably her superior:—though Berty Grandison declares that I am not worthy to hold a lucifer match to Netta Wraysbury; and Edgar is always writing about her naïveté and warmth of heart."

Thus frank and genuine in nature, the absence of all envious feeling afforded an additional charm to the sunny face of Theodosia.

The Romans, however, called her Titian's daughter rather than by her own name; for to that celebrated portrait she bore considerable resemblance.—Like her brother Edgar, she was

a buoyant, happy creature; and though to be dowerless in a country where the equi-distribution of fortunes places a penny in every pouch, precluded the possibility of a suitable matrimonial establishment, it did not prevent her having more partners and *proneurs* than any other of the Anglo-Roman belles.

That night, more especially,—the first time she had been seen out of her unbecoming suit of sables,—the enthusiasm in her favour was universal; nor did the buds of the beautiful bouquet she held in her hand, rival the glow which gratified vanity called into her smiling cheeks.

"Miss Molyneux would be thought nothing of in her own country," was Mrs. Grandison's insidious reply to the enthusiastic admiration expressed by the old Duke of Villa Hermosa. "The want of *retenu* admired here, because it is so unusual, and which passes for artlessness, is too common among English girls *de pur sang* to be even noticed in London."

"Beauty is beauty, whatever climate may

produce it," replied the duke, who had glided past the well-dressed, well-trained Miss Grandison, with the cold respect of *les trois saluts d'usage*.—"And see! how lovely and animated she looks, just now, her eyes sparkling, and the colour mantling in her cheeks,—like a startled nymph in some picture of one of our great masters."

Mrs. Grandison, who always pinched up her countenance and deportment into a certain air of prudish continental good breeding whenever she assumed her Murray, ugly, and railway bag, for a foreign tour,—looked extremely shocked at the comparison.

"Miss Molyneux seems out of sorts, certainly. —Some little quarrel, probably, between her and her partner, my eldest son."

"A suspicious circumstance, between two such handsome young people!" said the duke, good-humouredly.

The lady of Blandhurst replied only by an accelerated exercise of her fan. But had she

been talking to one of her fox-hunting countrymen instead of to a high-bred old grandee of Spain, she would probably have indulged in the hateful jargon current among great British chaperons, concerning the obvious desire of Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux to "catch" the heir of Blandhurst.

It sufficed to her wounded pride to hint that the brother of Miss Molyneux, now in England, was an admirer of her daughter Maude, which produced a sort of brother and sister acquaintance between Albert and Theodosia.

"But surely, *chère Madame*," persisted the old duke, "it can hardly be a brotherly and sisterly intimacy that has brought so vivid a glow into the cheeks of that beautiful girl, as she listens to the whispers of her partner?—And see! she is now as pale as death!—And now,—heaven bless me,—in tears! What can he have said to her?—Ha! she is hurrying away to her mother; who, after listening to her exclamations, seems as much agitated as herself."

"How provoking that I cannot obtain a sight of them!" exclaimed Mrs. Grandison, envying the advantage enjoyed by the tall old duke. "What *can* be the matter?"

And piously did she trust that the pretty pink ball-dress worn by his still prettier country-woman might not have proved too much for the resolution of her dear Berty.—If he should have been making a fool of himself!—A marriage with old Molyneux's dowerless daughter would be ruin to one whose upshot price in the matrimonial market was at least thirty thousand pounds; and for a month past, she had been prudently but not very courteously endeavouring to break off her long-established intimacy with the family. "It is so provoking that in these stuffy crowds," said she, peevishly addressing her companion, "one can neither see nor breathe."

And on his polite offer to give her his arm through the throng, she made her panting way towards the refreshment-room, expecting to find

her dear Berty in the act of administering a glass of iced-water to one, if not both, the ladies whom he had excited to such a state of agitation.

She met him in the doorway, looking startled and cross.—But as there was no young lady on his arm, and the duke, her gallant cavalier, spoke no English, she ventured to whisper, "I trust in goodness, Berty, you have not been committing yourself by a proposal to Miss Molyneux?"

"On the contrary, I have just been taking her to her carriage. It is a pity, mother, you were not at hand to wish her good bye."

"Good bye?—When I shall probably see her to-morrow?"

"Not for many to-morrows.—In a few hours, she starts with her family for England."

"For England?—*Theo. Molyneux?*"

"Lady Theodosia, if you please, my dear mother.—News has arrived this evening in a letter from Reuben Howard to the Hanoverian

Minister, of the sudden death of Lord Dinton. To my great surprise, I was the first to communicate it to the family."

Fain would Mrs. Grandison have rushed off in pursuit of the new countess and her daughter. —But it was too late to move an amendment.— The carriage had already driven from the door.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE destiny of one man appears to be regulated by the moment hand,—that of another, by the hour-hand, of the great dial of Eternity. The poor old squire at Denny Cross scarcely more than half alive, was still among the living; but the active,—the energetic,—the great,—the good,—the generous Lord Dinton had indeed ceased to exist. All was over:—a benefactor lost to his species,—an idol to his home.

So rapid had been the progress of that terrible malady, that the first alarm was scarcely circulated in the Castle and its environs, before

the worst was known.—The passing bell of the village church conveyed to many the first intimation of his seizure.

From the first, everything had been attempted that art could suggest.—But, as has been remarked by one of the wisest of our time, "while all ordinary diseases appear to yield more and more to our increased knowledge, pestilential diseases seem reserved by GOD for his own purposes, and to baffle as completely our power to meet them, as in the earliest ages of the world."*

That Lord Dinton died of a pestilential disease, the most contradictory of his friends did not deny.—The only question to be solved, was, whether it were typhus, endemic in the district; or simply the gaol-fever created by that cruel parsimony of penal legislators, which, from the days of John Howard at Kherson, to those of John Bull at Millbank, has hurried so many individuals into the grave.

* Dr. Arnold's Letters.

But without entering into this hygienic question, stormily discussed, just then, among the magistrates paid and unpaid of the county of North Hants, it is necessary, even at the cost of a miserably gloomy chapter, to resume our chain of events from the hurried departure of the two cousins from the court-yard of Harrals.

They had not been gone more than an hour, —Miss Wraysbury in her father's carriage,— Hilda on foot, unaccompanied, and wrapt in the first rough cloak she could snatch up in the hall,—when Sir John, in all the vague ill-humour of a chilled and hungry traveller, made his appearance.

At no time remarkable for the humility of his deportment, he was now peculiarly inflated by a sense of his personal importance, from his recent visit to Lynchcombe; which might be termed his seat of wealth, as Westminster the seat of empire. That was his throne, "let squires come bow to it;" his throne, from which he reigned over a

fortune of seventy thousand per annum. Harrals, and the Barony of Fitz-Alwyne *in nubibus*, were, by comparison, as the shell to the oyster.

"Where is Netta?" was his first exclamation to his sister, whom he found seated quietly in her widow's weeds in her own especial corner of the drawing-room sofa, working diligently at some interminable piece of knitting, as women sometimes do when the dearest interests of life are tossing about around them on the troubled waves of life, in imminent peril of wreck.

"The girls are both out," was her composed reply.

"At this late hour?" he angrily rejoined,—for daylight was fast waning.

"They are not together.—Netta is gone to Molyneux Castle,—Hilda into the village."

"But was not my daughter aware that I was expected home to-day?"

"Both of them appear to have gone suddenly distracted.—They went off, without apprising me."

"How then do you know where they are gone?"

"Helmsley informed me that Miss Wraysbury ordered the coachman to drive to Molyneux Castle as fast as his horses could take her. He added, without my asking, that Miss Wroughton had been seen hurrying towards the Rectory."

"The Rectory,—Harrals Rectory?" repeated Sir John in his surliest voice, as if fancying that his ears deceived him.

"Why it certainly seems improbable. She is aware of your interdiction. And the only one of the family with whom she is acquainted, my nephew Olave, has not been at home since our arrival."

"You *are* acquainted with him, then?"

"Two years ago, when he came on a tour of inspection to Joachimsthal and other educational establishments of Germany, he spent a few days with us at Frankfort, both in coming and returning.—My poor husband detested him."

"Then what can have induced Miss Wroughton to brave my displeasure by visiting his family —strangers to her—strangers to us all;—and to *me* most offensive?"

"To say the truth, there is a report in the house—But I scarcely like to tell you," continued Mrs. Wroughton, proceeding to count the stitches of her knitting.

"Of what are you afraid, Clara? Pray speak out," said Sir John, assuming a voice of encouragement, but looking awful as the Maelstrom.

"A report that Mr. Harpsden's nephew, whom you committed,—that is, who was committed by one of Lord Marington's sons, for poaching in your preserves,"—said she, correcting herself, on perceiving her brother's brow contract to a still more gloomy shade.

"Well—well!—To the point, to the point!"

"That he is dead in prison."

Sir John started. It was not *that* announcement for which he was prepared. He had expected to hear of his escape.

"And that the other lad——"

"His accomplice?"

"Is in the infirmary, and in the greatest danger:—from typhus, or cholera, or some other of those dreadful gaol epidemics."

"But what possible connection is there between the life or death of a couple of ruffians of that class, and my daughter's flying off alone to Molyneux Castle?" inquired Sir John, drawing up and endeavouring to rally his spirits; though the whiteness of his lips betrayed his inward agitation.

"I really wish it had *not*, brother.—But pray ring for Helmsley, and inquire of *him* what has transpired about this unfortunate business.—You seem so angry, that I hardly like to talk to you about it.—Yet surely I am not to blame?"

"*Much* to blame,—for listening to vulgar gossip, probably from your maid."

"No indeed," faltered Mrs. Wroughton, taunted into self-betrayal:—"it was from Dysart that I heard it."

In a moment, the bell was rung with a vehemence that caused the newly-laid cylinders to resound like cymbals; and Mrs. Dysart was hastily summoned. Concluding that she was wanted to receive orders concerning some branch of domestic economy connected with her master's recent visit to Lynchcombe, the mother of the maids came rustling and bustling in.—But the expression of Sir John Wraysbury's face checked her simpers in a moment.

"What is this you have been telling my sister, Mrs. Dysart, about a typhus fever?" said he, fiercely;—alluding, of course, to the fate of Kit Bothamley and his confederates.

"Why, begging your pardon, Sir John, they *do* say,—that is Tandy, the under-groom, when he rode in for the letter-bag this afternoon, brought back a report,—that—that——"

"Speak out, woman!"—cried her master, in tones wholly new to the ears polite of the voluminous housekeeper,—who was thereby roused to bitterness fully equal to his own.

"That Lord Dinton, sir, when he visited young Bothamley in gaol, in order to obtain his release, took the infection from the unfortunate young man, and is now at the worst,—not like to live through the night."

The angry man had indeed brought down an avalanche on his head!—Still, the first feeling that overpowered him was not that of remorse.

"The infection?—Malignant typhus?" faltered he, almost speechless from consternation. "And Netta at the Castle!"

"Just what I said, sir," observed Mrs. Dysart, gathering courage from his dismay. "I was making the remark to Mr. Helmsley at the very moment your bell rung.—But in course," glancing spitefully at Mrs. Wroughton, "nobody here had no authority to prevent Miss Wraysbury rushing into such danger."

Sir John was no longer listening. He was summing up in his mind the details of the case.—The heiress of all his wealth in danger

of her life, by proximity to gaol fever. His interference, perhaps, already too late.—Lynchcombe, the palace wherein last night his soul had taken its ease, looking forward to the dominion of its posterity, doomed to the ascendancy of a vulgar Liverpool money-spinner, talking broad Lancashire and wearing double-soled boots: — a man who would probably convert its beautiful gardens into potato grounds, and make broom-sticks of his plantations!

Such was his first view of the case. His second, an accidental glance having lighted on Netta's workbox, as it lay open and disordered on her little table,—a piece of half-finished embroidery hanging from it, as if hastily thrown down at the moment of departure,—his second, regarded himself, left lonely by the loss of that sweet companion. For ten years to come, Harry would be nothing to him. And in ten years, his own three-score would be more than accomplished.

So rapid is the glance of the human mind,

that all this and more had passed through the selfish soul of the millionary, and Mrs. Dysart was still lingering near the door, waiting for dismissal. Mrs. Wroughton, albeit unused to the imperative mood, was about, indeed, to take pity on her embarrassment, and tell her she might go; when her master suddenly bad her order his carriage to be got ready directly.

"What coachman, what carriage, if you please, Sir John?" said the circumstantial woman in authority. "Digges and the chariot are with Miss Wraysbury; the brougham and John Hastings went for you to the rail—"

"No matter what,—no matter which,—the brougham with a fresh horse,—Hastings, or the head groom to drive. But *immediately!*"

She was gone in a moment; but though Mrs. Wroughton went knitting on, she was becoming almost as much agitated as himself.

"You cannot surely be going to the Castle, my dear brother," said she; "tired and hungry as you must be. Wait at least, till after dinner;

Netta will probably return to dinner; you will only cross her on the road."

A prediction which appeared highly probable.

"Had not my niece intended to return," added Mrs. Wroughton, "she would have sent back the carriage."

Sir John could not but agree with her. Arguments drawn from the material business of life, convey the surest conviction. Again he rang the bell. "He would wait till after dinner; but it must be served to a moment."

It *was* served to a moment,—after the usual ceremonial of dressing-bell and serving-bell;—to the former of which, an unusual omission in that house of forms, no attention was paid, excepting in the point device white cravat of Helmsley.

The dinner, too, came and went unheeded.—The *purée*, the *filets*, the *salmi*,—"the saddle of mutton, Sir John, on the side table," might have been the paste-board properties of a stage-supper, for any enjoyment they afforded.

At length, when the dessert was brought into the room, Sir John looked anxiously at his watch, and again ordered the carriage. "She will not come *now*," said he, half aside, to his sister.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, are you not aware that the carriage has returned from Molyneux Castle?" interposed Helmsley; "Miss Wraysbury sleeps there to-night."

"Why the devil was not the message brought to me before?" cried his angry master.

"It was scarcely a message, Sir John. Only an intimation to Miss Wraysbury's maid. There was a note,—there were *two* notes."

"Bring them here directly, then."

"They are gone, Sir. One was to Miss Wroughton, addressed to the Rectory; the other to Mr. Farmer, at Denny Cross; the coachman had orders from Miss Wraysbury's own lips, to send off an express with it, the very moment he arrived."

The indignant Baronet was now becoming all

but frantic. All this business transacting in his house; and he, not so much as consulted!

Perceiving his master's excited state of mind, Helmsley, in his most confidential and deprecatory tones, ventured to suggest that "Miss Wraysbury was evidently unaware of the return home of Sir John." But Sir John knew better. *His* habits were as punctual as became a man who transacts his own business. Netta must have been as sure that he was by that time at Harrals, as that the sun, though invisible, was in the sky.

"Write a line, Clara, to your daughter," said he, abruptly addressing Mrs. Wroughton; "and bid her return home immediately. The carriage can fetch her before I use it."

"Miss Wroughton *is* at home, Sir John—she came in while you were at dinner. A gentleman (Mr. Harpsden, I fancy) escorted her to the door. I met her in the vestibule, and mentioned that you were dining. But she was ill, she said, and would go at once to her room."

How much more was the man of millions to learn from servants?—he who, on system, avoided all intercourse with them not strictly connected with their calling.

"Go to your daughter, my dear Clara," said he, more mildly, "and find out the exact purport of her cousin's message. I shall take no steps till I hear more."

But when Mrs. Wroughton and the obsequious Helmsley had both disappeared, came thronging thoughts which it was not easy to stifle. The idea of Netta passing the evening and night in the house of sickness, brought her before him in her capacity of the tenderest of nurses. Without pausing to reflect upon the impossibility that she should employ herself about the sick-bed of Lord Dinton, as she had done about his own, he fancied her keeping watch in the infected room, holding drink to the parched lips of the sufferer; and fainting dead, as he had seen her do, from over-watchfulness, after a night of vigil.

Even these engrossing visions, however, did not exclude the one dread thought that a certain rich man was the author of all this evil. If those unhappy lads,—those boyish offenders,—had been hurried into eternity, it was his doing.—If, for the value of a few hares or pheasants more or less to augment the sum-total of his game-lists, he had condemned two thoughtless boys to the demoralizing influence of a gaol, on his head was the responsibility.—If it pleased God to remove Lord Dinton, it was because, as the champion of the oppressed, he had, in their defence, gone forth as a true knight; and, in spite of his armour of righteousness, fallen a victim!

Of Denny Cross, hard as he was, he scarcely liked to think; not so much on account of the gentle woman lonely by its hearthside,—after all her life of self-devotion, sacrificed and broken-hearted at last; as because he knew that Roger Farmer, whose keen and searching perceptions he regarded as secondary only to the eye of Omniscience, was seated there in judgment upon his

petty motives: saying within himself—"John Woolston has proved, as I foresaw, a slave of Mammon:—unequal to the responsibilities of his lofty position;—unworthy the still mightier blessings of domestic peace."

The intelligence brought by Mrs. Wroughton from her daughter's room, was not calculated to dissipate these appalling reflections.—Netta had addressed to her cousin only as many words as would convey that nothing but a miracle could save the suffering man.

"Pray for us, dear Hilda," said the latter, "and bid the Harpsdens pray for him, for it was in *their* service he incurred his doom.—I am here as in quarantine; Edgar is not permitted to visit us.—Luckily for *him;* for the anguish of those two poor sisters, of whose lives Lord Dinton has been the ruling influence, is terrible to witness.—The grief of his dear old mother is as dignified as it is touching; probably, because aware that she shall soon rejoin him in a land where the tears will be wiped from off all faces.

—They have given me the room prepared for grandpapa—as being furthest from the infected wing. But poor grandpapa will never inhabit it. —As to Aunt Bessy.—But I dare not yet think of her.—Hilda,—dear Hilda—Why did I write that fatal, *fatal* letter !"

And not one thought of her father ! The dying man,—the family at the Castle,—the bed-ridden old squire,—the sorrowing betrothed,—the dowager,—the weeping sisters,—even those people at the Rectory, had mention,—and *he* was utterly forgotten !—

Was this his dutiful Netta ? Was this the child whose professions had been so fond ? Alas! —was not the fault his own ? Had he not repulsed her entreaties as she all but knelt at his feet, soliciting his clemency towards the Ash Bank delinquent ; or did she apply for poor Lord Dinton's assistance, till she found him utterly inexorable ? Had he not hurried off into Dorsetshire chiefly to avoid a renewal of her so-

licitations?—Had he not even cruelly reproached her with indifference to his care over the interests of her brother's future estate, only because she felt herself so much superior to poor Harry, as the future heiress of Lynchcombe?—

## CHAPTER XV.

THROUGHOUT that miserable evening, did Mrs. Wroughton pursue her task of knitting, as though the round world were revolving smoothly in its orbit, and all the human atoms haunting its surface pursuing their usual avocations; though, in reality, she would have given worlds to go and interrogate her daughter more closely concerning the sorrows of the Rectory, and terrors of the Castle.

But she dared not leave her brother. Though they exchanged not a word, she felt that he must wish to have some sort of companionship;

—so plain was it, from his starts of restlessness, that he was sorely tried.—Once or twice, she attempted to talk to him of Lynchcombe; hazarding inquiries concerning an aquarium, which, when they quitted the place, was in process of being added to the conservatory. But no answer could she obtain, beyond monosyllables recklessly applied. Sir John, usually so tenacious concerning his possessions, and so fond of enlarging on his improvements, listened as though he heard not.—Starting, every now and then, from his seat, he began to pace the room, whose dimensions afforded ample scope for an unquiet footstep; and once, instead of resuming his accustomed place on the sofa, he rushed to the window, and drawing aside the heavy damask curtains, unbarred the shutter, and peered out into the darkness. Perhaps he was reflecting on the dreary hours of watchfulness which, at that moment, were, for so many, fraught with anguish.

"Late as it is, I am half inclined to drive

over to Denny Cross," said he, suddenly addressing his sister.—" *There* they must know more than two girls like Netta and Hilda are likely to have been entrusted with."

A creature of ceremony, Mrs. Wroughton suggested the untimeliness of such a visit.—" It would be nearly ten o'clock before he got there. The family would have retired to bed."

As if there were bed-time that night for any one bearing the name of Pennington !

" Surely," added she, " if you wish for further information, it would be better to send at once to the Castle?—The distance is nearly the same."

" Two hours ago, I dispatched a messenger with a letter to Edgar. Another, half-an-hour since, (when tea was brought in,) to see what delayed the return of the first."

" You seem really very uneasy, my dear John," said Mrs. Wroughton, again counting her stitches. — " But depend upon it, my niece's anxiety has exaggerated the state of the case.—

How many people get through the typhus fever! Quite as many as fall victims to it. Particularly in Lord Dinton's class of life,—well clothed, well fed, and well attended.—Quite a different case from that of the two poachers. (Thirteen, and pass over two.)"

Had one syllable she uttered reached his ear, he would probably have felt inclined to snatch her unmeaning strip of work out of her hand, and fling it on the floor.—But all he seemed to hear were the words written by his daughter:—"His state is desperate,—he cannot live through the night."

If one of his messengers would only return and bring word that there was the slightest shade of amendment!

During one of his sister's more anxious investigation of her stitches, he *had* indeed written a few hasty lines to Hugh Pennington, and sent them off to Denny Cross; so that even if his grooms were detained at the Castle by the confusion of the moment, from the quiet

household of the old squire he was certain of a reply.

He was so far right, that the messenger to Denny Cross was the first to return. But, alas! it was only to bring back his letter.—Mr. Hugh and Mr. Farmer had been away at Lord Dinton's since the afternoon. Mrs. Farmer was with her sister. None of the old servants would hear of breaking in upon their grief.—For all now knew the worst—The anxieties of the conscience-struck Sir John must remain unappeased.

But while he continued to pace his gorgeous saloons,—now shuddering with cold, beside a blazing fire,—now retreating from its heat to the still uncurtained window, where he seemed to be interrogating the quiet stars, shining so serenely as if in mockery of his cares, — the overcharged hearts at Denny Cross were still patient. Their burthen was indeed heavy;—but the heaviest are often the most bravely borne.

From the moment Edgar's last express arrived, summoning Farmer and his brother-in-law to afford him their advice and support, and bidding them prepare the mind of Bessy for the grievous news that could not be long withheld, Miss Pennington, after one single outburst of grief and horror, had subsided into a sort of lethargy.—Scarcely lethargy, however; for every faculty was poignantly sensitive. But the blood seemed to have forsaken her veins,—so waxen white were her face and hands. Nor could the slightest variation of expression be detected in her vacant eyes.—Grief appeared to have paralysed her external frame, only to impart a sensibility more exquisite to every fibre of her heart.

She had proposed, in a steady though scarcely audible voice, to Mrs. Farmer, that they should go and sit by her father's bed-side: as if she considered *that* the stronghold of her life—the altar from which her prayers were likeliest to be heard.—The old man lay, as usual, calm,

impassive, and unconscious of their presence. —But in *their* hearts what tumults of care!

Mrs. Farmer was too wise to disturb by formal exhortations her sister's saintly frame of mind. She left her wholly to herself. Only holding her cold hand fondly enclasped; to denote to her now and then, by a kindly pressure, that there was one watching beside her in that darkened room, who sympathised in every pulsation of her heart.

Towards day-light, Mrs. Farmer rose and led her sister, unresisting as a child, from the room, and as she had often done *as* a child, undressed her and placed her in bed. Terrible was it for poor Sophia to see the woman but two days before so radiant with hope and happiness, prostrated by this sudden blow almost into the helpless state of her father. She soon sank off to sleep, —or to an insensibility that looked like sleep.— And when, towards noon, Farmer returned, haggard and wretched, having left his brother-in-law at the Castle, as some stay and com-

fort to poor Edgar, her curtains were still drawn.

There was, luckily, as yet no need to apprise her that all was over!—

## CHAPTER XVI.

LIKE the Marmite Perpétuelle, which is said to have been simmering from year's end to year's end, in Paris, for many centuries past, there exists in London,—there existed in Samuel Pepys' time, in Horace Walpole's, in Brummell's—in the time, in short, of all those searchers into the nonsenses of life which govern its graver interests, as a puff of wind, governing the windmill, serves to create the staff of life,—some individual whose consequence is of the most gratuitous kind, whose abilities are of the most inferential;—but to whom, in the various exigencies

of life, people seem to have come to a conclusion to refer for counsel.

Never a first-rate man. A first-rate man is a noun-substantive, who has enough to do with the regulation of his own affairs, and the enjoyment of his own position. But usually one who runs a good second:—a younger son of some noble family, with an income that enables him to give a few good dinners, intitling him to many in return.—Above all, what old Johnson would have called "a clubbable man;"—addicted to much gossip; endowed with a good memory, a good digestion, and a bad heart.

In the day of Sir John Wraysbury and the Dintons, Reuben Howard,—the *Honourable* Reuben, was the man; who having passed over the burning ploughshares of turf and gaming-table without a singe, was intitled to the name generally assigned him of a man of the nicest honour.—He had dabbled, too, in politics,—such politics as are created by the rinsings of many administrations; and was as closely connected

with the higher order of the press, as the patent hinge to the swing-door, with which it sways backwards and forwards, while appearing to govern its oscillations.

Now, Reuben, a man who had long contemplated the British Constitution as consisting of Clubs, Press, Queen, Lords, and Commons, now that he had somewhat survived the pleasanter illusions of life, and that the political interests of the country had outgrown his ken, (so that when he attempted a Cabinet intrigue, he looked like a superannuated groom run away with by a powerful horse to which he has pretended to give a gallop,) condescended a little more than in his hot youth to private legislation. If, as was said of him, he had never lost an enemy or gained a friend, no man in the three kingdoms had so extensive an acquaintance or ruled it with so masterly a hand.

This was partly the result of a certain tact, the spontaneous growth of the Upper Alps of society; and partly of the friction of the busy

world, in which he had been rolling for half a century, like the polished steel ball vibrating in one of the clocks of Sir William Congreve.

But it made him an incomparable referee in all those matters of pleasure which, westward of Temple Bar, pass for matters of business; such as disputed debts of honour,—uncertain bets,—political pledges sneakingly withdrawn,—a duel to be fought (or evaded),—a divorce to be obtained (or evaded):—a shabby transaction to be varnished over, or a disgraceful quarrel to be patched up.

If, as he was sometimes called, one of the patent mouchards of society, Reuben Howard had done infinite good in his generation, as, if not exactly a peace-maker, a suppressor of public scandals. He had healed as many wounds distressing to the public as Holloway's ointment; and set as many broken reputations, as Astley Cooper limbs. A valuable member of the society of the Upper Two Thousand: always ready to applaud what was likely to pass

for good or brilliant, or groan down what was foredoomed to unpopularity. His long-experienced eye foresaw a star in the West. He could detect a great reputation in its swaddling clothes; and be the first to bow down and worship.

On the other hand, he had, of course, disciples of his own; confederates and twaddlers of his own class and kind; monsterers of nothings, who had bribed their way into notice,—some by money,—some by wit,—some by a frog-like self-inflation into semblance of the ox that typifies John Bull. But, compared with Reuben, they were all impostors. They wanted his good-breeding, his cold-bloodedness, and his genius for concentrating his faculties on the prevailing topic of the day, like a policeman's bull's-eye turned upon a burglar.—They might emulate his faculty of knowing every man-worth-knowing's affairs and pedigree, better than he knew them himself. But not a greybeard of the titled herd understood like Reuben Howard,

when such knowledge might be paraded, or when it should be suppressed.

Such was the individual who, had been the privy-councillor of Gerald Molyneux in days when he had occasionally to compromise with some creditor, to shoot some injured husband, or out-perjure some injured woman or horse-dealer; and who, having often saved him by judicious advice from an irretrievable stumble on the banks of that mysterious receptacle of decayed reputations, known as "the dogs," — "the bad,"—or "Coventry,"—commanded proportionate gratitude.

Having so often received absolution and plenary indulgence at the hands of Reuben, it was not wonderful that his acolyte should consider him infallible. And such, therefore, was the Pope, in whose hands, on arriving at the Clarendon, the new Earl of Dinton deposited his conscience.

His objects in life considered, he could not, perhaps, have chosen better. For old Reuben

was intrinsically a gentleman.—Nor could he have selected a pleasanter Gamaliel. For with *him* there was no need of hypocritical pretence at fraternal affliction. Reuben was aware that the last Lord Dinton and the present had been as Jacob and Esau. — Nor did he personally pretend to share the regrets which had thrown a whole district of Northamptonshire into tears. As a schoolfellow and a brother Oxonian, he had always pitied, in the late lord, what he termed, "the miserable insignificance of poor Wilchester." Even his moral qualities, appeared to Reuben home-baked and heavy:—mutton instead of venison; served up with virtues, adapted to a white-washed cottage, not to a tapestried palace. His face was as unfamiliar at White's, as Canning's at the Alfred: even at the political clubs, he was a stranger; and such a man was neither of his times, nor of his Order. His death was the origin of no legerdemain at Newmarket. Announced at Tattersalls, no one would have referred to his book:—nor was there

a ballot the more in St. James's Street for his vacant place.—Decidedly, there was no drawback on any reasonable man's satisfaction in welcoming back Gerald Molyneux to the scenes of his dupehood, by the style and title of Earl of Dinton.

But after as intimate a scrutiny of the outward man of the new Earl, as decency would allow, (but Reuben Howard was one of those practised observers who see things at a single glance,) the layer-down of Club-law was almost tempted to exclaim, like Lear, against the "sophistication" of his visitor.

The new Earl, having paused at Paris to relieve himself and his family after the fatigues of their hurried journey, and prepare them for their re-appearance on the London stage, his hat and wig were ultra Parisian; and every body conversant with the *Mystères de Paris et de Londres*,—as connected with the toilet,—will admit that the well-dressed man of the Jockey Club, becomes a tiger in Pall Mall.

The first thing, therefore, hinted by the Pope of Berkeley Square to his acolyte, was that, of all his Parisian means and appliances, his new set of teeth by Desirabode could alone be retained with advantage. He also offered him the address of a decent tailor.

Lord Dinton looked down with an air half-injured, half-interrogative, on the capacious sleeves of his *redingotte à la Videl;* and when Reuben shook his head with a smile of affable condemnation, faltered the name of the London snip who had borne and forborne so laudably, on his account, his *very* long account, some ten years before; at which, Reuben indulged in a laugh as good-humoured as was compatible with his official Cato-ship.

"*That* worthy man died in the Queen's Bench, some ten years ago," said he: "thanks, I am afraid, my dear Dinton, to the extensive patronage of your friends. The squaretoes who has dressed *me* ever since I was at Harrow, is nearer your mark:— a first-rate fellow, who

takes measure not only of your inches, but your position in life. *He* would not allow that atrocious brother-in-law of yours to over-dress like a successful railway contractor; for he knows that the cut of a county member is stereotyped like that of a herald's tabard.—*He* realises his customer, as well as dresses him; and in taking your seat in the Lords, my dear Dinton, you must really abjure the vulgar pomps and vanities of Parisian flash.—I need not remind you how often trifling mistakes in costume or habits, suffice to brand a man for the remainder of his days."

No one knew it better than Lord Dinton; because no one had applied the branding iron more mercilessly, in his days of dandydom, than the Honourable Gerald Molyneux. He had not dreamed *then* that, in living to become an earl, he should also live to become a fogey!

"And where should you advise me to set up my staff, Reuben?" said he, endeavouring to rally his spirits. "The family penitentiary be-

longs to my mother, who will establish herself there shortly, that I may have the Castle free, to be remodelled and refitted before next hunting season."

"And even were it yours, I suppose you would what is called submit it to the hammer?" —rejoined his friend. "It costs a man an additional brougham-horse and a life of grace, to reach his club from that end of the town. What say you to Carlton Terrace?"

"Too near that vulgar dog, my brother-in-law."

"Or the Terrace in Piccadilly?"

"For a house *there*, you must book yourself as a country baronet's eldest son is put up at Boodle's,—the day you are born."

"Pardon me,—Fairlawn's house will be in the market before the year is out.—Fairlawn has been burning a whole candelabrum of candles at both ends, and is as decidedly hard up as if his rental were eight hundred a year instead of eighty thousand."

"Why, what has he been doing?"

"A little too much of every thing: a far more dangerous experiment than cultivating a single vice."

"His house, I admit, would be the very thing for me," said the Earl. "And Fairlawn knows how to live. It would save me a world of trouble to step into his shoes. I suppose his chef will be in the market as well as his *casa?*"

"Probably — he ought.—For I suspect my friend Loncier has been a principal cause of bringing it there."

"Is there any hope, think you, my dear Reuben, that the smash will be immediate?" said Lord Dinton, earnestly. "I should like amazingly to get settled in town before Easter. —I have a daughter to bring out, and a son to bring *in*—to parliament, of course."—

Reuben Howard interrupted him by an irresistible laugh, at the idea of his old friend

Gerald in the character of a chaperon and *pater familias*.

"*Que voulez vous!*" said he. "*Tout Valère finit par devenir Géronte.*"

And then he laughed again, at the idea that, from that transition, he was himself as safe as Queen Elisabeth.

"I shall see Fairlawn to-night at my sister Groby's, who has some sort of drum to meet as many royal highnesses as her house and her largest invitation card can hold," added Reuben. "Shall I sound him about his house and household?"

"I should be most obliged to you. I am willing to purchase the plantation, with all the slaves upon the property."

"*That*, I fear, would be impossible. He can only have a life interest in it; for he has got rid of every thing that was tangible;—all but this house and Fairlawn Manor."

"A long lease, then?"

"I will see about it for you," said Reuben,

taking out his pocket-book. "What are you prepared to give?"

"From twelve to fifteen hundred a year, for a first-class house, thoroughly furnished."

"Well, well.—I will throw out a feeler or two without committing you," added the universal commissioner, "and let you know how he seems disposed."

Poor Lord Dinton—already encoiled in the snares of social diplomacy!—In the Brown, Jones, and Robinson, class of the community, a man in want of a house, aware that an old acquaintance possessed one he wanted to get rid of, would naturally have paid him a visit or addressed him by letter, to make further inquiries. But following the fashion of the faithful humble servants, by whose subservience Reuben Howard was erected into an irresponsible minister of state, the new Earl seemed to fancy that the grand mystery of to let and to hire, could only be solved through his interference.

Then came the momentous questions of equi-

page and horseflesh.—A New Zealander newly caught, could not have appeared more at sea, in these matters, than the once knowing Gerald.—Reuben took pity, however, on the innocence of his second childhood, and condescended to hold his leading strings.—The plain dark brougham, the gorgeous state-chariot, the light park phaeton, were discussed and determined on; all three of which might, perhaps, have been constructed out of the timber used in the family coach of the Countess Dowager.

"But is Lady Dinton to exercise no choice in these matters?" inquired Reuben, who, though he had held Mrs. Molyneux as cheap as the brocade of an advertising haberdasher, began to entertain some respect for the future proprietress of a cook like Loncier.

"What woman's taste is to be trusted in regard to horses, harness, or carriages?" said the Earl, contemptuously. "Female influence, my dear Reuben, should never be allowed to extend to the stable-yard. Emma will have enough

to do in bringing forward her daughter. By the way, you must speak to your sister, the Duchess, about them."

"With the greatest pleasure. I am afraid, however, that some kind of election-feud has arisen between Groby Abbey and Harrals."

"So much the better; you don't suppose I am going to tie round my neck my mill-stone of a brother-in-law? When we were down in the world, he never held out a finger to us. *A mon tour!*—The last person I shall care to welcome to Fairlawn House, (and get it for me, my dear Reuben, you really must), will be Sir John Woolston Wraysbury."

The result of this appeal to the services of the lay diplomat, was that, late in the same evening, old Reuben was seen leading Lord Fairlawn into a recessed window of one of the most gloomy of the Duchess of Groby's suite of ill-lighted apartments, looking as mysterious as if about to negociate the pacification of Europe; though in reality about to extricate the much

be-Jewed nobleman from a predicament as awkward as Jason's before he had managed to chloroform the Colchian dragon.

His mind being set upon enjoying his Easter holidays in Paris, Lord Fairlawn came readily to terms; and almost before Lady Dinton and Lady Theodosia became familiar with their new names, they found themselves settled in one of the most charming residences in London. The younger of the two was still of opinion that the Bay of Naples afforded a pleasanter look-out than a park, which, calling itself Green, is usually brown.—But her lady mother, better up in her Court Guide, was satisfied that few cities in Europe afford a pleasanter locality.

Had the sumptuous reception-rooms contained fewer mirrors, poor Emma would perhaps have found more satisfaction in them. For, alas! a restless mind and uneasy life had ravaged her fine features; and in endeavouring to repair by too much art these natural defections, she doubled the injury. But it did seem

a little hard that her beauty should have taken leave of her, previous to the arrival of her fortune.

All she had formerly thought and said concerning the fruitless elevation of poor Maria, recurred, moreover, to her mind, when she found herself nearly as great a stranger in London as formerly Lady Wraysbury.

The lapse of a season or two suffices to break up a coterie,—by death,—by dispersion,—by the divorce of one, the default of another :—the great quicksand of time swallowing them up unnoticed. But return after half-a-dozen years of absence in a foreign land, and it is far easier to count those who remain, than those who have vanished. The contemporaries whom the vain Emma had looked forward to dazzle and mortify, if Gerald should ever succeed to the Earldom of Dinton, were many of them in a better land; and many estranged from the follies of fashion by higher pursuits and nobler duties.

Still, an engrossing purpose remained to be accomplished. — Theo. must be suitably married; and Edgar honourably established in public life.

To effect this, her spirits must not flag on the threshold of the *beau monde.* Her mourning might be unbecoming; and the impossibility of ball-giving, a disadvantage. — But spirit and enterprise would do much. Her sisters, Caroline and Clara, had inherited the slavish spirit of poor Lady Woolston; but like Sir John, and Sir Harry before him, *she* had projects of her own.

"But, dearest mums, when shall we go out of town?" pleaded Lady Theodosia, after a week spent in their new mansion, already a little tired of the *avant saison* so tedious in London to those for whom no family connections create minor engagements.—"I want to see these two cousins, of whom Edgar raves so perseveringly."

"You will see more than enough of them, darling, at the end of the London season."—

"I would rather see them *now*.—At present, every thing seems strange, and every body cold. We know so few people in town, and they are most of them so disagreeable!"

"You used to be fond of the Grandisons."

"But I hoped in London to see new faces. It is a bore to listen to nothing but Monsieur de St. Marcel's and Lord Frederick Hill's Neapolitan reminiscences;—stories that my cradle was rocked with.—As to that old Duchess of Groby—"

"Hush, hush, my dear Theo. Duchesses are never to be called old. And you must be cautious in London in your use of proper names. You know nothing of the English great world, where every body is related to every body."

"I wish Edgar would come up to town, mamma," replied Lady Theodosia, with a sigh. "There are so many people and things I want him to explain to me:—people and things, I can't help fancying, that have sprung up since you lived in London."

"You must learn to call your brother, Wilchester, Theo.—It sounds better than Edgar."

"It does not, however, come so near my heart. But why does he loiter so in Northamptonshire?"

"Because long absence has alienated him from us.—He was learning to love his uncle better than his father."

"And therefore prefers the society of those by whom he is most regretted. Yes, I understand; and I daresay he is a great comfort to grandmamma and my aunts.—It is very kind and considerate of you, mother, not to force him to leave them."

Her ladyship tacitly accepted her daughter's approval. No need to inform her, that propinquity to the heiress of Lynchcombe, was the leading object in her projects for her son.

END OF VOL. II.

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